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CRITICAL MISCELLANIES

BY

JOHN MORLEY

VOL. I.

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NOTE.

NEARLY the whole of the contents of the present volumes have already appeared in the pages of the *Fortnightly Review*. The Essays have all been submitted to revision, and some of them have been enlarged.

June 9, 1877.

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ROBESPIERRE.

I.

A FRENCH writer has recently published a careful and interesting volume on the famous events which ended in the overthrow of Robespierre and the close of the Reign of Terror.[1] These events are known in the historic calendar as the Revolution of Thermidor in the Year II. After the fall of the monarchy, the Convention decided that the year should begin with the autumnal equinox, and that the enumeration should date from the birth of the Republic. The Year I. opens on September 22, 1792; the Year II. opens on the same day of 1793. The month of Thermidor begins on July 19. The memorable Ninth Thermidor therefore corresponds to July 27, 1794. This has commonly been taken as the date of the commencement of a counter-revolution, and in one sense it was so. Comte, however, and others have preferred to fix the reaction at the execution of Danton (April 5, 1794), or Robespierre's official

[1] *La Révolution de Thermidor.* Par Ch. D'Héricault. Paris: Didier, 1876.

proclamation of Deism in the Festival of the Supreme Being (May 7, 1794).

M. D'Héricault does not belong to the school of writers who treat the course of history as a great high road, following a firmly traced line, and set with plain and ineffaceable landmarks. The French Revolution has nearly always been handled in this way, alike by those who think it fruitful in blessings, and by their adversaries, who pronounce it a curse inflicted by the wrath of Heaven. Historians have looked at the Revolution as a plain landsman looks at the sea. To the landsman the ocean seems one huge immeasurable flood, obeying a simple law of ebb and flow, and offering to the navigator a single uniform force. Yet in truth we know that the oceanic movement is the product of many forces; the seeming uniformity covers the energy of a hundred currents and counter-currents; the sea-floor is not even nor the same, but is subject to untold conditions of elevation and subsidence; the sea is not one mass, but many masses moving along definite lines of their own. It is the same with the great tides of history. Wise men shrink from summing them up in single propositions. That the French Revolution led to an immense augmentation of happiness, both for the French and for mankind, can only be denied by the Pope. That it secured its beneficent results untempered by any mixture of evil, can only be maintained by men as mad as Doctor Pangloss. The Greek poetess Corinna said to the youthful Pindar, when he had interwoven all the gods

and goddesses in the Theban mythology into a single hymn, that we should sow with the hand and not with the sack. Corinna's monition to the singer is proper to the interpreter of historical truth: he should cull with the hand, and not sweep in with the scythe. It is doubtless mere pedantry to abstain from the widest conception of the sum of a great movement. A clear, definite, and stable idea of the meaning in the history of human progress of such vast groups of events as the Reformation or the Revolution, is indispensable for any one to whom history is a serious study of society. It is just as important, however, not to forget that they were really groups of events, and not in either case a single uniform movement. The World-Epos is after all only a file of the morning paper in a state of glorification. A sensible man learns, in everyday life, to abstain from praising and blaming character by wholesale; he becomes content to say of this trait that it is good, and of that act that it was bad. So in history, we become unwilling to join or to admire those who insist upon transferring their sentiment upon the whole to their judgment upon each part. We seek to be allowed to retain a decided opinion as to the final value to mankind of a long series of transactions, and yet not to commit ourselves to set the same estimate on each transaction in particular, still less on each person associated with it. Why shall we not prize the general results of the Reformation, without being obliged to defend John of Leyden and the Munster Anabaptists?

M. D'Héricault's volume naturally suggests such reflections as these. Of all the men of the Revolution, Robespierre has suffered most from the audacious idolatry of some writers, and the splenetic impatience of others. M. Louis Blanc and M. Ernest Hamel talk of him as an angel or a prophet, and the Ninth Thermidor is a red day indeed in their martyrology. Michelet and M. D'Héricault treat him as a mixture of Cagliostro and Caligula, both a charlatan and a miscreant. We are reminded of the commencement of an address of the French Senate to the first Bonaparte: 'Sire,' they began, 'the desire for perfection is one of the worst maladies that can afflict the human mind.' This bold aphorism touches one of the roots of the judgments we pass both upon men and events. It is because people so irrationally think fit to insist upon perfection, that Robespierre's admirers would fain deny that he ever had a fault, and the tacit adoption of the same impracticable standard makes it easier for Robespierre's wholesale detractors to deny that he had a single virtue or performed a single service. The point of view is essentially unfit for history. The real subject of history is the improvement of social arrangements, and no conspicuous actor in public affairs since the world began saw the true direction of improvement with an absolutely unerring eye from the beginning of his career to the end. It is folly for the historian, as it is for the statesman, to strain after the imaginative unity of the dramatic creator. Social progress is an affair of many small

pieces and slow accretions, and the interest of historic study lies in tracing, amid the immense turmoil of events and through the confusion of voices, the devious course of the sacred torch, as it shifts from bearer to bearer. And it is not the bearers who are most interesting, but the torch.

In the old Flemish town of Arras, known in the diplomatic history of the fifteenth century by a couple of important treaties, and famous in the industrial history of the Middle Ages for its pre-eminence in the manufacture of the most splendid kind of tapestry hangings, Maximilian Robespierre was born in May 1758. He was therefore no more than five and thirty years old when he came to his ghastly end in 1794. His father was a lawyer, and, though the surname of the family had the prefix of nobility, they belonged to the middle class. When this decorative prefix became dangerous, Maximilian Derobespierre dropped it. His great rival, Danton, was less prudent or less fortunate, and one of the charges made against him was that he had styled himself Monsieur D'Anton.

Robespierre's youth was embittered by sharp misfortune. His mother died when he was only seven years old, and his father had so little courage under the blow that he threw up his practice, deserted his children, and died in purposeless wanderings through Germany. The burden that the weak and selfish throw down, must be taken up by the brave. Friendly

kinsfolk charged themselves with the maintenance of the four orphans. Maximilian was sent to the school of the town, whence he proceeded with a sizarship to the college of Louis-le-Grand in Paris. He was an apt and studious pupil, but austere, and disposed to that sombre cast of spirits which is common enough where a lad of some sensibility and much self-esteem finds himself stamped with a badge of social inferiority. Robespierre's worshippers love to dwell on his fondness for birds: with the universal passion of mankind for legends of the saints, they tell how the untimely death of a favourite pigeon afflicted him with anguish so poignant, that, even sixty long years after, it made his sister's heart ache to look back upon the pain of that tragic moment. Always a sentimentalist, Robespierre was from boyhood a devout enthusiast for the great high priest of the sentimental tribe. Rousseau was then passing the last squalid days of his life among the meadows and woods at Ermenonville. Robespierre, who could not have been more than twenty at the time, for Rousseau died in the summer of 1778, is said to have gone on a reverential pilgrimage in search of an oracle from the lonely sage, as Boswell and as Gibbon and a hundred others had gone before him. Rousseau was wont to use his real adorers as ill as he used his imaginary enemies. Robespierre may well have shared the discouragement of the enthusiastic father who informed Rousseau that he was about to bring up his son on the principles of *Emilius*. 'Then so much the worse,' cried the per-

verse philosopher, 'both for you and your son.' If he had been endowed with second sight, he would have thought at least as rude a presage due to this last and most ill-starred of a whole generation of neophytes.

In 1781 Robespierre returned to Arras, and amid the welcome of his relatives and the good hopes of friends began the practice of an advocate. For eight years he led an active and seemly life. He was not wholly pure from that indiscretion of the young appetite, about which the world is mute, but whose better ordering and governance would give a diviner brightness to the earth. Still, if he did not escape the ordeal of youth, Robespierre was frugal, laborious, and persevering. His domestic amiability made him the delight of his sister, and his zealous self-sacrifice for the education and advancement in life of his younger brother was afterwards repaid by Augustin Robespierre's devotion through all the fierce and horrible hours of Thermidor. Though cold in temperament, extremely reserved in manners, and fond of industrious seclusion, Robespierre did not disdain the social diversions of the town. He was a member of a reunion of Rosati, who sang madrigals and admired one another's bad verses. Those who love the ironical surprises of fate, may picture the young man who was doomed to play so terrible a part in terrible affairs, going through the harmless follies of a ceremonial reception by the Rosati, taking three deep breaths over a rose, solemnly fastening the emblem to his

coat, emptying a glass of rose-red wine at a draught to the good health of the company, and finally reciting couplets that Voltaire would have found almost as detestable as the Law of Prairial or the Festival of the Supreme Being. More laudable efforts of ambition were prize essays, in which Robespierre has the merit of taking the right side in important questions. He protested against the inhumanity of laws that inflicted civil infamy upon the innocent family of a convicted criminal. And he protested against the still more horrid cruelty which reduced unfortunate children born out of wedlock to something like the status of the mediæval serf. Robespierre's compositions at this time do not rise above the ordinary level of declaiming mediocrity, but they promised a manhood of benignity and enlightenment. To compose prize essays on political reforms was better than to ignore or to oppose political reform. But the course of events afterwards owed their least desirable bias to the fact that such compositions were the nearest approach to political training that so many of the revolutionary leaders underwent. One is inclined to apply to practical politics Arthur Young's sensible remark about the endeavour of the French to improve the quality of their wool: 'A cultivator at the head of a sheep-farm of 3000 or 4000 acres, would in a few years do more for their wools than all the academicians and philosophers will effect in ten centuries.'

In his profession he distinguished himself in one or two causes of local celebrity. An innovating

citizen had been ordered by the authorities to remove a lightning-conductor from his house within three days, as being a mischievous practical paradox, as well as a danger and an annoyance to his neighbours. Robespierre pleaded the innovator's case on appeal, and won it. He defended a poor woman who had been wrongfully accused by a monk belonging to the powerful corporation of a great neighbouring abbey. The young advocate did not even shrink from manfully arguing a case against the august Bishop of Arras himself. His independence did him no harm. The Bishop afterwards appointed him to the post of judge or legal assessor in the episcopal court. This tribunal was a remnant of what had once been the sovereign authority and jurisdiction of the Bishops of Arras. That a court with the power of life and death should thus exist by the side of a proper corporation of civil magistrates, is an illustration of the inextricable labyrinth of the French law and its administration on the eve of the Revolution. Robespierre did not hold his office long. Every one has heard the striking story, how the young judge, whose name was within half a dozen years to take a place in the popular mind of France and of Europe with the bloodiest monsters of myth or history, resigned his post in a fit of remorse after condemning a murderer to be executed. 'He is a criminal, no doubt,' Robespierre kept groaning in reply to the consolations of his sister, for women are more positive creatures than men: 'a criminal, no doubt; but to put a man to death!' Many a man

thus begins the great voyage with queasy sensibilities, and ends it a cannibal.

Among Robespierre's associates in the festive mummeries of the Rosati was a young officer of Engineers, who was destined to be his colleague in the dread Committee of Public Safety, and to leave an important name in French history. In the garrison of Arras, Carnot was quartered,—that iron head, whose genius for the administrative organisation of war achieved even greater things for the new republic than the genius of Louvois had achieved for the old monarchy. Carnot surpassed not only Louvois, but perhaps all other names save one in modern military history, by uniting to the most powerful gifts for organisation, both the strategic talent that planned the momentous campaign of 1794, and the splendid personal energy and skill that prolonged the defence of Antwerp against the allied army in 1814. Partisans dream of the unrivalled future of peace, glory, and freedom that would have fallen to the lot of France, if only the gods had brought about a hearty union between the military genius of Carnot and the political genius of Robespierre. So, no doubt, after the restoration of Charles II. in England, there were good men who thought that all would have gone very differently, if only the genius of the great creator of the Ironsides had taken counsel with the genius of Venner, the Fifth-Monarchy Man, and Feak, the Anabaptist prophet.

The time was now come when such men as Robespierre were to be tried with fire, when they were to

drink the cup of fury and the dregs of the cup of trembling. Sybils and prophets have already spoken their inexorable decree, as Goethe has said, on the day that first gives the man to the world; no time and no might can break the stamped mould of his character; only as life wears on, do all its aforeshapen lines come into light. He is launched into a sea of external conditions, that are as independent of his own will as the temperament with which he confronts them. It is action that tries, and variation of circumstance. The leaden chains of use bind many an ugly unsuspected prisoner in the soul; and when the habit of their lives has been sundered, the most immaculate are capable of antics beyond prevision. A great crisis of the world was prepared for Robespierre and those others, his allies or his destroyers, who with him came like the lightning and went like the wind.

At the end of 1788 the King of France found himself forced to summon the States-General. It was their first assembly since 1614. On the memorable Fourth of May, 1789, Robespierre appeared at Versailles as one of the representatives of the third estate of his native province of Artois. The excitement and enthusiasm of the elections to this renowned assembly, the immense demands and boundless expectations that they disclosed, would have warned a cool observer of events, if in that heated air a cool observer could have been found, that the hour had struck for the fulfilment of those grim apprehensions of revolution that had risen in the minds of many

shrewd men, good and bad, in the course of the previous half century. No great event in history ever comes wholly unforeseen. The antecedent causes are so wide-reaching, many, and continuous, that their direction is always sure to strike the eye of one or more observers in all its significance. Lewis the Fifteenth, whose invincible weariness and heavy disgust veiled a penetrating discernment, measured accurately the scope of the conflict between the crown and the parlements: but, said he, things as they are will last my time. Under the roof of his own palace at Versailles, in the apartment of Madame de Pompadour's famous physician, one of Quesnai's economic disciples had cried out, 'The realm is in a sore way; it will never be cured without a great internal commotion; but woe to those who have to do with it; into such work the French go with no slack hand.' Rousseau, in a passage in the Confessions, not only divines a speedy convulsion, but with striking practical sagacity enumerates the political and social causes that were unavoidably drawing France to the edge of the abyss. Lord Chesterfield, so different a man from Rousseau, declared as early as 1752, that he saw in France every symptom that history had taught him to regard as the forerunner of deep change; before the end of the century, so his prediction ran, both the trade of king and the trade of priest in France would be shorn of half their glory. D'Argenson in the same year declared a revolution inevitable, and with a curious precision of anticipation assured himself that

if once the necessity arose of convoking the States-General, they would not assemble in vain: *qu'on y prenne garde! ils seraient fort sérieux!* Oliver Goldsmith, idly wandering through France, towards 1755, discerned in the mutinous attitude of the judicial corporations, that the genius of freedom was entering the kingdom in disguise, and that a succession of three weak monarchs would end in the emancipation of the people of France. The most touching of all these presentiments is to be found in a private letter of the great Empress, the mother of Marie Antoinette herself. Maria Theresa describes the ruined state of the French monarchy, and only prays that if it be doomed to ruin still more utter, at least the blame may not fall upon her daughter. The Empress had not learnt that when the giants of social force are advancing from the sombre shadow of the past, with the thunder and the hurricane in their hands, our poor prayers are of no more avail than the unbodied visions of a dream.

The old popular assembly of the realm was not resorted to before every means of dispensing with so drastic a remedy had been tried. Historians sometimes write as if Turgot were the only able and reforming minister of the century. God forbid that we should put any other minister on a level with that high and beneficent figure. But Turgot was not the first statesman, both able and patriotic, who had been disgraced for want of compliance with the conditions of success at court; he was only the last of a

series. Chauvelin, a man of vigour and capacity, was dismissed with ignominy in 1736. Machault, a reformer, at once courageous and wise, shared the same fate twenty years later; and in his case revolution was as cruel and as heedless as reaction, for, at the age of ninety-one, the old man was dragged, blind and deaf, before the revolutionary tribunal and thence despatched to the guillotine. Between Chauvelin and Machault, the elder D'Argenson, who was greater than either of them, had been raised to power, and then speedily hurled down from it (1747), for no better reason than that his manners were uncouth, and that he would not waste his time in frivolities that were as the breath of life in the great gallery at Versailles and on the smooth-shaven lawns of Fontainebleau.

Not only had wise counsellors been tried; consultative assemblies had been tried also. Necker had been dismissed in 1781, after publishing the memorable Report which first initiated the nation in the elements of financial knowledge. The disorder waxed greater, and the monarchy drew nearer to bankruptcy each year. The only modern parallel to the state of things in France under Lewis the Sixteenth is to be sought in the state of things in Egypt or in Turkey. Lewis the Fourteenth had left a debt of between two and three thousand millions of livres, but this had been wiped out by the heroic operations of Law; operations, by the way, which have never yet been scientifically criticised. But the debt soon grew

again, by foolish wars, by the prodigality of the court, and by the rapacity of the nobles. It amounted in 1789 to something like two hundred and forty millions sterling; and it is interesting to notice that this was exactly the sum of the public debt of Great Britain at the same time. The year's excess of expenditure over receipts in 1774 was about fifty millions of livres: in 1787 it was one hundred and forty millions, or according to a different computation even two hundred millions. The material case was not at all desperate, if only the court had been less infatuated, and the spirit of the privileged orders had been less blind and less vile. The fatality of the situation lay in the characters of a handful of men and women. For France was abundant in resources, and even at this moment was far from unprosperous, in spite of the incredible trammels of law and custom. An able financier, with the support of a popular chamber and the assent of the sovereign, could have had no difficulty in restoring the public credit. But the conditions, simple as they might seem to a patriot or to posterity, were unattainable so long as power remained with a caste that were anything we please except patriots. An Assembly of Notables was brought together, but it was only the empty phantasm of national representation. Yet the situation was so serious that even this body, of arbitrary origin as it was, still was willing to accept vital reforms. The privileged order, who were then as their descendants are now, the worst conservative party in Europe,

immediately persuaded the magisterial corporation to resist the Notables. The judicial corporation or Parlement of Paris had been suppressed under Lewis the Fifteenth, and unfortunately revived again at the accession of his grandson. By the inconvenient constitution of the French government, the assent of that body was indispensable to fiscal legislation, on the ground that such legislation was part of the general police of the realm. The king's minister, now Loménie de Brienne, devised a new judicial constitution. But the churchmen, the nobles, and the lawyers all united in protestations against such a blow. The common people are not always the best judges of a remedy for the evils under which they are the greatest sufferers, and they broke out in disorder both in Paris and the provinces. They discerned an attack upon their local independence. Nobody would accept office in the new courts, and the administration of justice was at a standstill. A loan was thrown upon the market, but the public could not be persuaded to take it up. It was impossible to collect the taxes. The interest on the national debt was unpaid, and the fundholder was dismayed and exasperated by an announcement that only two-fifths would be discharged in cash. A very large part of the national debt was held in the form of annuities for lives, and men who had invested their savings on the credit of the government, saw themselves left without a provision. The total number of fundholders cannot be ascertained with any precision, but

it must have been very considerable, especially in Paris and the other great cities. Add to these all the civil litigants in the kingdom, who had portions of their property virtually sequestrated by the suspension of the courts into which the property had been taken. The resentment of this immense body of defrauded public creditors and injured private suitors explains the alienation of the middle class from the monarchy. In the convulsions of our own time, the moneyed interests have been on one side, and the population without money on the other. But in the first and greatest convulsion, those who had nothing to lose found their animosities shared by those who had had something to lose, and had lost it.

Deliberative assemblies, then, had been tried, and ministers had been tried; both had failed, and there was no other device left, except one which was destructive to absolute monarchy. Lewis the Sixteenth was in 1789 in much the same case as that of the King of England in 1640. Charles had done his best to raise money without any parliament for twelve years: he had lost patience with the Short Parliament; finally, he was driven without choice or alternative to face as he best could the stout resolution and the wise patriotism of the Long Parliament. Men sometimes wonder how it was that Lewis, when he came to find the National Assembly unmanageable, and discovering how rapidly he was drifting towards the thunders of the revolutionary cataract, did not break up a Chamber over which neither the court,

nor even a minister so popular as Necker, had the least control. It is a question whether the sword would not have broken in his hand. Even supposing, however, that the army would have consented to a violent movement against the Assembly, the King would still have been left in the same desperate straits from which he had looked to the States-General to extricate him. He might perhaps have dispersed the Assembly; he could not disperse debt and deficit. Those monsters would have haunted him as implacably as ever. There was no new formula of exorcism, nor any untried enchantment. The success of violent designs against the National Assembly, had success been possible, could, after all, have been followed by no other consummation than the relapse of France into the raging anarchy of Poland, or the sullen decrepitude of Turkey.

This will seem to some persons no better than fatalism. But, in truth, there are two popular ways of reading the history of events between 1789 and 1794, and each of them seems to us as bad as the other. According to one, whatever happened in the Revolution was good and admirable, because it happened. According to the other, something good and admirable was always attainable, and, if only bad men had not interposed, always ready to happen. Of course, the only sensible view is that many of the revolutionary solutions were detestable, but no other solution was within reach. This is undoubtedly the best of possible worlds; if the best is not so good as

we could wish, that is the fault of the possibilities. Such a doctrine is neither fatalism nor optimism, but an honest recognition of long chains of cause and effect in human affairs.

The great gathering of chosen men was first called States-General; then it called itself National Assembly; it is commonly known in history as the Constituent Assembly. The name is of ironical association, for the constitution which it framed after much travail endured for no more than a few months. Its deliberations lasted from May 1789 until September 1791. Among its members were three principal groups. There was, first, a band of blind adherents of the old system of government with all or most of its abuses. Second, there was a Centre of timid and one-eyed men, who were for transforming the old absolutist system into something that should resemble the constitution of our own country. Finally, there was a Left, with some differences of shade, but all agreeing in the necessity of a thorough remodelling of every institution and most of the usages of the country. 'Silence, you thirty votes!' cried Mirabeau one day, when he was interrupted by the dissents of the Mountain. This was the original measure of the party that in the twinkling of an eye was to wield the destinies of France. In our own time we have wondered at the rapidity with which a Chamber that was one day on the point of bringing back the grand-nephew of Lewis the Sixteenth, found itself a little later voting that Republic which has since been

ratified by the nation, and has at this moment the ardent good wishes of every enlightened politician in Europe. In the same way it is startling to think that within three years of the beheading of Lewis the Sixteenth, there was probably not one serious republican in the representative assembly of France. Yet it is always so. We might make just the same remark of the House of Commons at Westminster in 1640, and of the Assembly of Massachusetts or of New York as late as 1770. The final flash of a long unconscious train of thought or intent is ever a surprise and a shock. It is a mistake to set these swift changes down to political levity; they were due rather to quickness of political intuition. It was the King's attempt at flight in the summer of 1791 that first created a republican party. It was that unhappy exploit, and no theoretical preferences, that awoke France to the necessity of choosing between the sacrifice of monarchy and the restoration of territorial aristocracy.

Political intuition was never one of Robespierre's conspicuous gifts. But he had a doctrine that for a certain time served the same purpose. Rousseau had kindled in him a fervid democratic enthusiasm, and had penetrated his mind with the principle of the Sovereignty of the People. This famous dogma contained implicitly within it the more indisputable truth that a society ought to be regulated with a view to the happiness of the people. Such a principle made it easier for Robespierre to interpret rightly the first

phases of the revolutionary movement. It helped him to discern that the concentrated physical force of the populace was the only sure protection against a civil war. And if a civil war had broken out in 1789, instead of 1793, all the advantages of authority would have been against the popular party. The first insurrection of Paris is associated with the harangue of Camille Desmoulins at the Palais Royal, with the fall of the Bastille, with the murder of the governor, and a hundred other scenes of melodramatic horror and the blood-red picturesque. The insurrection of the Fourteenth of July 1789 taught Robespierre a lesson of practical politics, which exactly fitted in with his previous theories. In his resentment against the oppressive disorder of monarchy and feudalism, he had accepted the counter principle that the people can do no wrong, and nobody of sense now doubts that in their first great act the people of Paris did what was right. Six days after the fall of the Bastille, the Centre were for issuing a proclamation denouncing popular violence and ordering rigorous vigilance. Robespierre was then so little known in the Assembly that even his name was usually misspelt in the journals. From his obscure bench on the Mountain he cried out with bitter vehemence against the proposed proclamation:—'Revolt! But this revolt is liberty. The battle is not at its end. To-morrow, it may be, the shameful designs against us will be renewed; and who will there then be to repulse them, if beforehand we declare the very men

to be rebels, who have rushed to arms for our protection and safety?' This was the cardinal truth of the situation. Everybody knows Mirabeau's saying about Robespierre:—'That man will go far: he believes every word that he says!' This is much, but it is only half. It is not only that the man of power believes what he says; what he believes must fit in with the facts and with the demands of the time. Now Robespierre's firmness of conviction happened at this stage to be rightly matched by his clearness of sight.

It is true that a passionate mob, its unearthly admixture of laughter with fury, of vacancy with deadly concentration, is as terrible as some uncouth antediluvian, or the unfamiliar monsters of the sea, or one of the giant plants that make men shudder with mysterious fear. The history of our own country in the eighteenth century tells of the riots against meeting-houses in Doctor Sacheverell's time, and the riots against papists and their abettors in Lord George Gordon's time, and Church-and-King riots in Doctor Priestley's time. It would be too daring, therefore, to maintain that the rabble of the poor have any more unerring political judgment than the rabble of the opulent. But, in France in 1789, Robespierre was justified in saying that revolt meant liberty. If there had been no revolt in July, the court party would have had time to mature their infatuated designs of violence against the Assembly. In October these designs had come to life again. The royalists at Versailles had exultant banquets, at which, in the

presence of the Queen, they drank confusion to all patriots, and trampled the new emblem of freedom passionately underfoot. The news of this odious folly soon travelled to Paris. Its significance was speedily understood by a populace whose wits were sharpened by famine. Thousands of fire-eyed women and men tramped intrepidly out towards Versailles. If they had done less, the Assembly would have been dispersed or arbitrarily decimated, even though such a measure would certainly have left the government in desperation.

At that dreadful moment of the Sixth of October, amid the slaughter of guards and the frantic yells of hatred against the Queen, it is no wonder that some were found to urge the King to flee to Metz. If he had accepted the advice, the course of the Revolution would have been different; but its march would have been just as irresistible, for revolution lay in the force of a hundred combined circumstances. Lewis, however, rejected these counsels, and suffered the mob to carry him in bewildering procession to his capital and his prison. That great man who was watching French affairs with such consuming eagerness from distant Beaconsfield in our English Buckinghamshire, instantly divined that this procession from Versailles to the Tuileries marked the fall of the monarchy. 'A revolution in sentiment, manners, and moral opinions, the most important of all revolutions in a word,' was in Burke's judgment to be dated from the Sixth of October 1789.

The events of that day did, indeed, give its definite cast to the situation. The moral authority of the sovereign came to an end, along with the ancient and reverend mystery of the inviolability of his person. The Count d'Artois, the King's second brother, one of the most worthless of human beings, as incurably addicted to sinister and suicidal counsels in 1789 as he was when he overthrew his own throne forty years later, had run away from peril and from duty after the insurrection of July. After the insurrection of October, a troop of the nobles of the court followed him. The personal cowardice of the Emigrants was only matched by their political blindness. Many of the most unwise measures in the Assembly were only passed by small majorities, and the majorities would have been transformed into minorities, if in the early days of the Revolution these unworthy men had only stood firm at their posts. Selfish oligarchies have scarcely ever been wanting in courage. The emigrant noblesse of France are almost the only instance of a great privileged and territorial caste that had as little bravery as they had patriotism. The explanation is that they had been an oligarchy, not of power or duty, but of self-indulgence. They were crushed by Richelieu to secure the unity of the monarchy. They now effaced themselves at the Revolution, and this secured that far greater object, the unity of the nation.

The disappearance of so many of the nobles from France was not the only abdication on the part of

the conservative powers. Cowed and terrified by the events of October, no less than three hundred members of the Assembly sought to resign. The average attendance even at the most important sittings was often incredibly small. Thus the Chamber came to have little more moral authority in face of the people of Paris than had the King himself. The people of Paris had themselves become in a day the masters of France.

This immense change led gradually to a decisive alteration in the position of Robespierre. He found the situation of affairs at last falling into perfect harmony with his doctrine. Rousseau had taught him that the people ought to be sovereign, and now the people were being recognised as sovereign *de facto* no less than *de jure*. Any limitations on the new divine right united the horror of blasphemy to the secular wickedness of political treason. After the Assembly had come to Paris, a famishing mob in a moment of mad fury murdered an unfortunate baker, who was suspected of keeping back bread. These paroxysms led to the enactment of a new martial law. Robespierre spoke vehemently against it; such a law implied a wrongful distrust of the people. Then discussions followed as to the property qualification of an elector. Citizens were classed as active and passive. Only those were to have votes who paid direct taxes to the amount of three days' wages in the year. Robespierre flung himself upon this too famous distinction with bitter tenacity. If all men

are equal, he cried, then all men ought to have votes: if he who only pays the amount of one day's work, has fewer rights than another who pays the amount of three days, why should not the man who pays ten days have more rights than the other who only pays the earnings of three days? This kind of reasoning had little weight with the Chamber, but it made the reasoner very popular with the throng in the galleries. Even within the Assembly, influence gradually came to the man who had a parcel of immutable axioms and postulates, and who was ready with a deduction and a phrase for each case as it arose. He began to stand out like a needle of sharp rock, amid the flitting shadows of uncertain purpose and the vapoury drift of wandering aims.

Robespierre had no social conception, and he had nothing which can be described as a policy. He was the prophet of a sect, and had at this period none of the aims of the chief of a political party. What he had was democratic doctrine, and an intrepid logic. And Robespierre's intrepid logic was the nearest approach to calm force and coherent character that the first three years of the Revolution brought into prominence. When the Assembly met, Necker was the popular idol. Almost within a few weeks, this well-meaning, but very incompetent divinity had slipped from his throne, and Lafayette had taken his place. Mirabeau came next. The ardent and animated genius of his eloquence fitted him above all men to ride the whirlwind and direct the storm.

And on the memorable Twenty-third of June '89, he had shown the genuine audacity and resource of a revolutionary statesman, when he stirred the Chamber to defy the King's demand, and hailed the royal usher with the resounding words :—'You, sir, have neither place nor right of speech. Go tell those who sent you that we are here by the will of the people, and only bayonets shall drive us hence!' But Mirabeau bore a tainted character, and was always distrusted. 'Ah, how the immorality of my youth,' he used to say, in words that sum up the tragedy of many a puissant life, 'how the immorality of my youth hinders the public good!' The event proved that the popular suspicion was just: the patriot is now no longer merely suspected, but known, to have sullied his hands with the money of the court. He did not sell himself, it has been said; he allowed himself to be paid. The distinction was too subtle for men doing battle for their lives and for freedom, and Mirabeau's popularity waned towards the middle of 1790. The next favourite was Barnave, the generous and high-minded spokesman of those sanguine spirits who to the very end hoped against hope to save both the throne and its occupant. By the spring of 1791 Barnave followed his predecessors into disfavour. The Assembly was engaged on the burning question of the government of the colonies. Were the negro slaves to be admitted to citizenship, or was a legislature of planters to be entrusted with the task of social reformation? Our own generation has seen in

the republic of the West what strife this political difficulty is capable of raising. Barnave pronounced against the negroes. Robespierre, on the contrary, declaimed against any limitation of the right of the negro, as a compromise with the avarice, pride, and cruelty of a governing race, and a guilty trafficking with the rights of man. Barnave from that day saw that his laurel crown had gone to Robespierre.

If the people 'called him noble that was now their hate, him vile that was their garland,' they did not transfer their affections without sound reason. Barnave's sensibility was too easily touched. There are many politicians in every epoch whose principles grow slack and flaccid at the approach of the golden sun of royalty. Barnave was one of those who was sent to bring back the fugitive King and Queen from Varennes, and the journey by their side in the coach unstrung his spirit. He became one of the court's clandestine advisers. Men of this weak susceptibility of imagination are not fit for times of revolution. To be on the side of the court was to betray the cause of the nation. We cannot take too much pains to realise that the voluntary conversion of Lewis the Sixteenth to a popular constitution and the abolition of feudalism, was practically as impossible as the conversion of Pope Pius the Ninth to the doctrine of a free church in a free state. Those who believe in the miracle of free will may think of this as they please. Sensible people who accept the scientific account of human character, know that the

sudden transformation of a man or a woman brought up to middle age as the heir to centuries of absolutist tradition, into adherents of a government that agreed with the doctrines of Locke and Milton, was only possible on condition of supernatural interference. The King's good nature was no substitute for political capacity or insight. An instructive measure of the degree in which he possessed these two qualities may be found in that deplorable diary of his, where on such days as the Fourteenth of July, when the Bastille fell, and the Sixth of October, when he was carried in triumph from Versailles to the Tuileries, he made the simple entry, '*Rien.*' And he had no firmness. It was as difficult to keep the King to a purpose, La Marck said to Mirabeau, as to keep together a number of well-oiled ivory balls. Lewis, moreover, was guided by a more energetic and less compliant character than his own.

Marie Antoinette's high mien in adversity, and the contrast between the dazzling splendour of her first years and the scenes of outrage and bloody death that made the climax of her fate, could not but strike the imaginations of men. Such contrasts are the very stuff of which Tragedy, the gorgeous muse with scepter'd pall, loves to weave her most imposing raiment. But history must be just; and the character of the Queen had far more concern in the disaster of the first five years of the Revolution than had the character of Robespierre. Every new document that comes to light heaps up proof that if

blind and obstinate choice of personal gratification before the common weal be enough to constitute a state criminal, then the Queen of France was one of the worst state criminals that ever afflicted a nation. The popular hatred of Marie Antoinette sprang from a sound instinct. We shall never know how much or how little truth there was in those frightful charges against her, that may still be read in a thousand pamphlets. These imputed depravities far surpass anything that John Knox ever said against Mary Stuart, or that Juvenal has recorded against Messalina; and, perhaps, for the only parallel we must look to the hideous stories of the Byzantine secretary against Theodora, the too famous empress of Justinian and the persecutor of Belisarius. We have to remember that all the revolutionary portraits are distorted by furious passion, and that Marie Antoinette may no more deserve to be compared to Mary Stuart than Robespierre deserves to be compared to Ezzelino or to Alva. The aristocrats were the libellers, if libels they were. It is at least certain that, from the unlucky hour when the Austrian archduchess crossed the French frontier, a childish bride of fourteen, down to the hour when the Queen of France made the attempt to recross it in resentful flight one and twenty years afterwards, Marie Antoinette was ignorant, unteachable, blind to events and deaf to good counsels, a bitter grief to her heroic mother, the evil genius of her husband, the despair of her truest advisers, and an exceedingly bad friend

to the people of France. When Burke had that immortal vision of her at Versailles—'just above the horizon, decorating and cheering the elevated sphere she just began to move in, glittering like the morning star, full of life and splendour and joy'—we know from the correspondence between Maria Theresa and her minister at Versailles, that what Burke really saw was no divinity, but a flighty and troublesome schoolgirl, an accomplice in all the ignoble intrigues, and a sharer of all the small busy passions, that convulse the insects of a court. The levity that came with her Lorraine blood, broke out in incredible dissipations; in indiscreet visits to the masked balls at the opera, in midnight parades and mystifications on the terrace at Versailles, in insensate gambling. 'The court of France is turned into a gaming-hell,' said the Emperor Joseph, the Queen's own brother: 'if they do not amend, the revolution will be cruel.' These vices or follies were less mischievous than her intervention in affairs of state. Here her levity was as marked as in the paltry affairs of the boudoir and the ante-chamber, and here to levity she added both dissimulation and vindictiveness. It was the Queen's influence that procured the dismissal of the two virtuous ministers by whose aid the King was striving to arrest the decay of the government of his kingdom. Malesherbes was distasteful to her for no better reason than that she wanted his post for some favourite's favourite. Against Turgot she conspired with tenacious animosity, because he had

suppressed a sinecure which she designed for a court parasite, and because he would not support her caprice on behalf of a worthless creature of her faction. These two admirable men were disgraced on the same day. The Queen wrote to her mother that she had not meddled in the affair. This was a falsehood, for she had even sought to have Turgot thrown into the Bastille. 'I am as one dashed to the ground,' cried the great Voltaire, now nearing his end. 'Never can we console ourselves for having seen the golden age dawn and vanish. My eyes see only death in front of me, now that Turgot is gone. The rest of my days must be all bitterness.' What hope could there be that the personage who had thus put out the light of hope for France in 1776, would welcome that greater flame which was kindled in the land in 1789?

When people write hymns of pity for the Queen, we always recall the poor woman whom Arthur Young met, as he was walking up a hill to ease his horse near Mars-le-Tour. Though the unfortunate creature was only twenty-eight, she might have been taken for sixty or seventy, her figure was so bent, her face so furrowed and hardened by toil. Her husband, she said, had a morsel of land, one cow, and a poor little horse, yet he had to pay forty-two pounds of wheat and three chickens to one Seigneur, and one hundred and sixty pounds of oats, one chicken, and one franc to another, besides very heavy tailles and other taxes; and they had seven children. She had heard that

'something was to be done by some great folks for such poor ones, but she did not know who nor how, but God send us better, for the tailles and the dues grind us to the earth.' It was such hapless drudges as this who replenished the Queen's gaming tables at Versailles. Thousands of them dragged on the burden of their harassed and desperate days, less like men and women than beasts of the field wrung and tortured and mercilessly overladen, in order that the Queen might gratify her childish passion for diamonds, or lavish money and estates on worthless female Polignacs and Lamballes, or kill time at a cost of five hundred louis a night at lansquenet and the faro bank. The Queen, it is true, was in all this no worse than other dissipated women then and since. She did not realise that it was the system to which she had stubbornly committed herself, that drove the people of the fields to cut their crops green to be baked in the oven, because their hunger could not wait; or made them cower whole days in their beds, because misery seemed to gnaw them there with a duller fang. That she was unconscious of its effect, makes no difference in the real drift of her policy; makes no difference in the judgment that we ought to pass upon it, nor in the gratitude that is owed to the stern men who rose up to consume her and her court with righteous flame. The Queen and the courtiers, and the hard-faring woman of Mars-le-Tour, and that whole generation, have long been dust and shadow; they have vanished from the earth, as if

they were no more than the fire-flies that the peasant of the Italian poet saw dancing in the vineyard, as he took his evening rest on the hillside. They have all fled back into the impenetrable shade whence they came; our minds are free; and if social equity is not a chimera, Marie Antoinette was the protagonist of the most barbarous and execrable of causes.

Let us return to the shaping of the Constitution, not forgetting that its stability was to depend upon the Queen. Robespierre left some characteristic marks on the final arrangements. He imposed upon the Assembly a motion prohibiting any member of it from accepting office under the Crown for a period of four years after the dissolution. Robespierre from this time forth constantly illustrated a very singular truth; namely, that the most ostentatious faith in humanity in general seems always to beget the sharpest distrust of all human beings in particular. He proceeded further in the same direction. It was Robespierre who persuaded the Chamber to pass a self-denying ordinance. All its members were declared ineligible for a seat in the legislature that was to replace them. The members of the Right on this occasion went with their bitter foes of the Extreme Left, and to both parties have been imputed sinister and Machiavellian motives. The Right, aware that their own return to the new Assembly was impossible, were delighted to reduce the men with whom they had been carrying on incensed battle for two long

years, to their own obscurity and impotence. Robespierre, on the other hand, is accused of a jealous desire to exclude Barnave from power. He is accused also of a deliberate intention to weaken the new legislature, in order to secure the preponderance of the Parisian clubs. There is no evidence that these malignant feelings were in Robespierre's mind. The reasons he gave were exactly of the kind that we should have expected to weigh with a man of his stamp. There is even a certain truth in them, that is not inconsistent with the experience of a parliamentary country like our own. To talk, he said, of the transmission of light and experience from one assembly to another, was to distrust the public spirit. The influence of opinion and the general good grows less, as the influence of parliamentary orators grows greater. He had no taste, he proceeded with one of his chilly sneers, for that new science which was styled the tactics of great assemblies; it was too like intrigue. Nothing but truth and reason ought to reign in a legislature. He did not like the idea of clever men becoming dominant by skilful tactics, and then perpetuating their empire from one assembly to another. He wound up his discourse with some theatrical talk about disinterestedness. When he sat down, he was greeted with enthusiastic acclamations, such as a few months before used to greet the stormful Mirabeau, now wrapped in eternal sleep amid the stillness of the new Pantheon. The folly of Robespierre's inferences is obvious enough. If only truth

and reason ought to weigh in a legislature, then it is all the more important not to exclude any body of men through whom truth and reason may possibly enter. Robespierre had striven hard to remove all restrictions from admission to the electoral franchise. He did not see that to limit the choice of candidates was in itself the most grievous of all restrictions.

The common view has been that the Constitution of 1791 perished because its creators were thus disabled from defending the work of their hands. This view led to a grave mistake four years later, after Robespierre had gone to his grave. The Convention, framing the Constitution of the Year III., decided that two-thirds of the existing assembly should keep their places, and that only one-third should be popularly elected. This led to the revolt of the Thirteenth Vendémiaire, and afterwards to the coup d'état of the Eighteenth Fructidor. In that sense, no doubt, Robespierre's proposal was the indirect root of much mischief. But it is childish to believe that if a hundred of the most prominent members of the Constituent had found seats in the new assembly, they would have saved the Constitution. Their experience, the loss of which it is the fashion to deplore, could have had no application to the strange combinations of untoward circumstance that were now rising up with such deadly rapidity in every quarter of the horizon, like vast sombre banks of impenetrable cloud. Prudence in new cases, as has been somewhere said, can do nothing on grounds of retro-

spect. The work of the Constituent was doomed by the very nature of things. Their assumption that the Revolution was made, while all France was still torn by fierce and unappeasable disputes as to seignorial rights, was one of the most striking pieces of self-deception in history. It is told how in the eleventh century, when the fervent hosts of the Crusaders tramped across Europe on their way to deliver the Holy City from the hands of the unbelievers, the wearied children, as they espied each new town that lay in their interminable march, cried out with joyful expectation, 'Is not this, then, Jerusalem?' So France had set out on a portentous journey, little knowing how far off was the end; lightly taking each poor halting-place for the deeply longed-for goal; and waxing more fiercely disappointed, as each new height that they gained only disclosed yet farther and more unattainable horizons. 'Alas,' said Burke, 'they little know how many a weary step is to be taken, before they can form themselves into a mass which has a true political personality.'

An immense revolution had been effected, but by what force were its fruits to be guarded? Each step in the revolution had raised a host of irreconcilable enemies. The rights of property, the old and jealous associations of local independence, the traditions of personal dignity, the relations of the civil to the spiritual power—these were the momentous matters about which the lawmakers of the Constituent had exercised themselves. The parties of the Chamber

had for these two years past been laying mine and countermine among the very deepest foundations of society. One by one each great corporation of the old order had been alienated from the new order. It was inevitable that it should be so. Let us look at one or two examples of this. The monarchy had imposed administrative centralisation upon France without securing national unity. Thus the great provinces that had been slowly added one after the other to the monarchy, while becoming members of the same kingdom, still retained different institutions and isolated usages. The time was now come when France should be France, and its inhabitants Frenchmen, and no longer Bretons, Normans, Gascons, Provençals. The Assembly by a single decree (1790) redivided the country into eighty-three departments. It wiped out at a stroke the separate administrations, the separate parlements, the peculiar privileges, and even the historic names of the old provinces. We need not dwell on the significance of this change here, but will only remark in passing that the stubborn disputes from the time of the Regency downwards between the Crown and the provincial parlements turned, under other names and in other forms, upon this very issue of the unification of the law. The Crown was with the progressive party, but it lacked the strength and courage to set aside retrograde local sentiment as the Constituent Assembly was able to set it aside.

Then this prodigious change in the distribution of

government was accompanied by no less prodigious a change in the source of power. Popular election replaced the old system of territorial privilege and aristocratic prerogative. The effect of this vital innovation, followed as it was a few months later by a decree abolishing titles and armorial bearings, was to complete the estrangement of the old privileged classes from the revolutionary movement. All that they had meant to concede was the payment of an equal land tax. What was life worth to the noble, if common people were to be allowed to wear arms and to command a company of foot or a troop of horse; if he was no longer to have thousands of acres left waste for the chase: if he was compelled to sue for a vote where he had only yesterday reigned as manorial lord; if, in short, he was at a stroke to lose all those delights of insolence and vanity which had made, not the decoration, but the very substance, of his days?

Nor were the nobles of the sword and the red-heeled slipper the only outraged class. The magistracy of the provincial parliaments were inflamed with resentment against changes that stripped them of the power of exciting against the new government the same factious and impracticable spirit with which they had on so many occasions embarrassed the old. The clergy were thrown even still more violently into opposition. The Assembly, sorely pressed for resources, declared the property held by ecclesiastics, amounting to a revenue of not less than eight million

pounds sterling a year, or double that amount in modern values, to be the property of the nation. Talleyrand carried a measure decreeing the sale of the ecclesiastical domain. The clergy were as intensely irritated as laymen would have been by a similar assertion of sovereign right. And their irritation was made still more dangerous by the next set of measures against them.

The Assembly withdrew all recognition of Catholicism as the religion of the State; monastic vows were abolished, and orders and congregations suppressed; the ecclesiastical divisions were made to coincide with the civil divisions, a bishop being allotted to each department. What was a more important revolution than all, bishops and incumbents were henceforth to be appointed by popular election. The Assembly, who had always the institutions of our own country before them, meant to introduce into France the system of the Church of England, which was even then an anachronism in the land of its birth; much worse was such a system an anachronism, after belief had been sapped by a Voltaire and an Encyclopædia. The clergy both showed and excited a mutinous spirit. The Assembly, by way of retort, decreed that all ecclesiastics should take the oath of allegiance to the civil constitution of the clergy, on pain of forfeiture of their benefices. Five-sixths of the clergy refused, and the result was an outbreak of religious fury in the great towns of the south and elsewhere, which recalled the violence of the sixteenth century and the Reformation.

Thus when the Constituent Assembly ceased from its labours, the popular party had to face the mocking and defiant privileged classes; the magistracy, whose craft and calling were gone; and the clergy and as many of the flocks as shared the holy vindictiveness of their pastors. Immense material improvements had been made, but who was to guard them against all these powerful and exasperated bands? No chamber could execute so portentous an office, least of all a chamber that was bound to work in accord with a King, who at the very moment when he was swearing fidelity to the new order of things, was sending entreaties to the King of Prussia and to the Emperor, his brother-in-law, to overthrow the new order and bring back the old. If the Revolution had achieved priceless gains for France, they could only be preserved on condition that public action was directed by those who valued these gains for themselves and for their children above all things else—above the monarchy, above the constitution, above peace, above their own sorry lives. There was only one party who showed this passionate devotion, this fanatical resolution not to suffer the work that had been done to be undone, and never to allow France to sink back from exalted national life into the lethargy of national death. That party was the Jacobins, and, above all, the austere and rigorous Jacobins of Paris. On their ascendancy depended the triumph of the Revolution, and on the triumph of the Revolution depended the salvation of France.

Their ascendancy meant a Jacobin dictatorship, and against this, as against dictatorship in all its forms, many things have been said, and truly said. But the one most important thing that can be said about Jacobin dictatorship is that, in spite of all the dolorous mishaps and hateful misdeeds that marked its course, it was still the only instrument capable of concentrating and utilising the dispersed social energy of the French people. The crisis was not a crisis of logic but of force, and the Jacobins alone understood, as the old Covenanters had understood, that problems of force are not solved by phrases, but by mastery and the sword.

The great popular club of Paris was the centre of all those who looked at events in this spirit. The Legislative Assembly, the successor of the Constituent, met in the month of October 1791. Like its predecessor, the Legislative contained a host of excellent and patriotic men, and they at once applied themselves to the all-important task, which the Constituent had left so deplorably incomplete, of finally breaking down the old feudal rights. The most important group in the new chamber were the deputies from the Gironde. Events soon revealed violent dissents between the Girondins and the Jacobins, but, for some months after the meeting of the Legislative, Girondins and Jacobins represented together in unbroken unity the great popular party. From this time until the fall of the monarchy, the whole of this popular party in all its branches found their rallying-place, not in

the Assembly, but in the Jacobin Club; and the ascendancy of the Jacobin Club embodied the dictatorship of Paris. It was only from Paris that the whole circle of events could be commanded. When the peasants had got what they wanted, that is to say the emancipation of the land, they were ready to think that the Revolution was in safety and at an end. They were in no position to see the enmity of the exiles, the dangerous selfishness of Austria and Prussia, the disloyal machinations of the court, the reactionary sentiment of La Vendée, the absolute unworkableness of the new constitution. Arthur Young, in the height of the agitations of the Constituent Assembly, found himself at Moulins, the capital of the Bourbonnais, and on the great post-road to Italy. He went to the best coffee-house in the town, and found as many as twenty tables spread for company, but as for a newspaper, he says he might as well have asked for an elephant. In the capital of a great province, the seat of an intendant, at a moment like that, with a National Assembly voting a revolution, and not a newspaper to tell the people whether Fayette, Mirabeau, or Lewis XVI. were on the throne! Could such a people as this, he cries, ever have made a revolution or become free? 'Never in a thousand centuries: the enlightened mob of Paris have done the whole.' And that was the plain truth. What was involved in such a truth, we shall see presently.

Robespierre had now risen to be one of the foremost men in France. To borrow the figure of an

older chief of French faction, from trifling among the violins in the orchestra, he had ascended to the stage itself, and had a right to perform leading parts. Disqualified for sitting in the Assembly, he wielded greater power than ever in the Club. The Constituent had been full of his enemies. 'Alone with my own soul,' he once cried to the Jacobins, 'how could I have borne struggles that were beyond any human strength, if I had not raised my spirit to God?' This isolation marked him with a kind of theocratic distinction. These communings with the unseen powers gave a certain indefinable prerogative to a man, even among the children of the century of Voltaire. Condorcet, the youngest of the intimates and disciples of Voltaire, of D'Alembert, of Turgot, was the first to sound bitter warning that Robespierre was at heart a priest. The suggestion was more than a gibe. Robespierre had the typic sacerdotal temperament, its sense of personal importance, its thin unction, its private leanings to the stake and the cord; and he had one of those deplorable natures that seem as if they had never in their lives known the careless joys of a springtime. By and by, from mere priest he developed into the deadlier carnivore, the Inquisitor

The absence of advantages of bodily presence has never been fatal to the pretensions of the pontiff. Robespierre was only a couple of inches above five feet in height, but the Grand Monarch himself was hardly more. His eyes were small and weak, and he usually wore spectacles; his face was pitted by the

marks of small-pox; his complexion was dull and sometimes livid; the tones of his voice were dry and shrill; and he spoke with the vulgar accent of his province. Such is the accepted tradition, and there is no reason to dissent from it. It is fair, however, to remember that Robespierre's enemies had command of his historic reputation at its source, and this is always a great advantage for faction, if not for truth. So Robespierre's voice and person may have been maligned, just as Aristophanes may have been a calumniator when he accused Cleon of having an intolerably loud voice and smelling of the tanyard. What is certain is that Robespierre was a master of effective oratory adapted for a violent popular audience, to impress, to persuade, and to command. The Convention would have yawned, if it had not trembled under him, but the Jacobin Club never found him tedious. Robespierre's style had no richness either of feeling or of phrase; no fervid originality, no happy violences. If we turn from a page of Rousseau to a page of Robespierre, we feel that the disciple has none of the thrilling sonorousness of the master; the glow and the ardour have become metallic; the long-drawn plangency is parodied by shrill notes of splenetic complaint. The rhythm has no broad wings; the phrases have no quality of radiance; the oratorical glimpses never lift the spirit into new worlds. We are never conscious of those great pulses of strong emotion that shake and vibrate through the nobly-measured periods of Cicero or Bossuet or Burke.

Robespierre could not rival the vivid and highly-coloured declamation of Vergniaud; his speeches were never heated with the ardent passion that poured like a torrent of fire through some of the orations of Isnard; nor, above all, had he any mastery of that dialect of the Titans, by which Danton convulsed an audience with fear, with amazement, or with the spirit of defiant endeavour. The absence of these intenser qualities did not make Robespierre's speeches less effective for their own purpose. On the contrary, when the air has become torrid, and passionate utterance is cheap, then severity in form is very likely to pass for good sense in substance. That Robespierre had decent fluency, copiousness, and finish, need hardly be said. The French have an artistic sense; they have never accepted our own whimsical doctrine, that a man's politics must be sagacious, if his speaking is only clumsy enough. Robespierre more than once showed himself ready with a forcible reply on critical occasions: this only makes him an illustration the more of the good oratorical rule, that he is most likely to come well out of the emergency of an improvisation, who is usually most careful to prepare. Robespierre was as solicitous about the correctness of his speech, as he was about the neatness of his clothes; he no more grudged the pains given to the polishing of his discourses than he grudged the time given every day to the powdering of his hair.

Nothing was more remarkable than his dexterity in presenting his case. James Mill used to point out

to his son among other skilful arts of Demosthenes, these two: first, that he said everything important to his purpose at the exact moment when he had brought the minds of his hearers into the state most fitted to receive it; second, that he insinuated gradually and indirectly into their minds ideas which would have roused opposition if they had been expressed more directly. Mr. Mill once called the attention of the present writer to exactly the same kind of rhetorical skill in the speeches of Robespierre. The reader may do well to turn, for excellent specimens of this, to the speech of January 11, 1792, against the war, or that of May 1794 against atheism. The logic is stringent, but the premises are arbitrary. Robespierre is as one who should iterate indisputable propositions of abstract geometry and mechanics, while men are craving an architect who shall bridge the gulf of waters. Exuberance of high words no longer conceals the sterility of his ideas and the shallowness of his method. We should say of his speeches, as of so much of the speaking and writing of the time, that it is transparent and smooth, but there is none of that quality which the critics of painting call Texture.

His listeners, however, in the old refectory of the Convent of the Jacobins took little heed of these things; the matter was too absorbing, the issue too vital. A hundred years before, the hunted Covenanters of the Western Lowlands, with Claverhouse's dragoons a few miles off, exulted in the endless exhortations and expositions of their hill preachers;

they relished nothing so keenly as three hours of Mucklewrath, followed by three hours more of Peter Poundtext. We now find the jargon of the Mucklewraths and the Poundtexts of the Solemn League and Covenant, dead as it is, still not devoid of the picturesque and the impressive. If we cannot say the same of the great preacher of the Declaration of the Rights of Man, the reason is partly that time has not yet softened the tones, and partly that there is no one in all the world with whom it is so difficult to sympathise, as with the narrower fanatics of our own particular faith.

We have still to mark the trait that above everything else gave to Robespierre the trust and confidence of Paris. As men listened to him, they had full faith in the integrity of the speaker. And Robespierre in one way deserved this confidence. He was eminently the possessor of a conscience. When the strain of circumstance in the last few months of his life pressed him towards wrong, at least before doing wrong he was forced to lie to his own conscience. This is a kind of honesty, as the world goes. In the Salon of 1791 an artist exhibited Robespierre's portrait, simply inscribing it, *The Incorruptible.* Throngs passed before it every day, and ratified the honourable designation by eager murmurs of approval. The democratic journals were loud in panegyric on the unsleeping sentinel of liberty. They loved to speak of him as the modern Fabricius, and delighted to recall the words of Pyrrhus, that it is easier to turn the sun

from its course, than to turn Fabricius from the path of honour. Patriotic parents eagerly besought him to be sponsor for their children. Ladies of wealth, including at least one countrywoman of our own, vainly entreated him to accept their purses, for women are quick to recognise the temperament of the priest, and recognising they adore. A rich widow of Nantes besought him with pertinacious tenderness to accept not only her purse but her hand. Mirabeau's sister hailed him as an eagle floating through the blue heavens.

Robespierre's life was frugal and simple, as must always be seemly in the spokesman of the dumb multitude whose lives are very hard. He had a single room in the house of Duplay, at the extreme west end of the long Rue Saint Honoré, half a mile from the Jacobin Club, and less than that from the Riding School of the Tuileries, where the Constituent and Legislative Assemblies held session. His room, which served him for bed-chamber as well as for the uses of the day, was scantily furnished, and he shared the homely fare of his host. Duplay was a carpenter, a sworn follower of Robespierre, and the whole family cherished their guest as if he had been a son and a brother. Between him and the eldest daughter of the house there grew up a more tender sentiment, and Robespierre looked forward to the joys of the hearth, so soon as his country should be delivered from the oppressors without and the traitors within.

Eagerly as Robespierre delighted in his popularity,

he intended it to be a force and not a decoration. An occasion of testing his influence arose in the winter of 1791. The situation had become more and more difficult. The court was more disloyal and more perverse, as its hopes that the nightmare would come to an end became fainter. In the summer of 1791, the German Emperor, the King of Prussia, and minor champions of retrograde causes issued the famous Declaration of Pilnitz. The menace of intervention was the one element needed to make the position of the monarchy desperate. It roused France to fever heat. For along with the foreign kings were the French princes of the blood and the French nobles. In the spring of 1792, the Assembly forced the King to declare war against Austria. Robespierre, in spite of the strong tide of warlike feeling, led the Jacobin opposition to the war. This is one of the most sagacious acts of his career, for the hazards of the conflict were terrible. If the foreigners and the emigrant nobles were victorious, all that the Revolution had won would be instantly and irretrievably lost. If, on the other hand, the French armies were victorious, one of two disasters might follow. Either the troops might become a weapon in the hands of the court and the reactionary party, for the suppression of all the progressive parties alike; or else their general might make himself supreme. Robespierre divined, what the Girondins did not, that Narbonne and the court, in accepting the cry for war, were secretly designing, first, to crush the faction of emi-

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grant nobles, then to make the King popular at home, and thus finally to construct a strong royalist army. The Constitutional party in the Leglislative Assembly had the same ideas as Narbonne. The Girondins sought war; first, from a genuine, if not a profoundly wise, enthusiasm for liberty, which they would fain have spread all over the world; and next, because they thought that war would increase their popularity, and give them decisive control of the situation.

The first effect of the war declared in April 1792 was to shake down the throne. Operations had no sooner begun than the King became an object of bitter and amply warranted suspicion. Neither the leaders nor the people had forgotten his flight a year before to place himself at the head of the foreign invaders, nor the letter that he had left behind him for the National Assembly, protesting against all that had been done. They were again reminded of what short shrift they might expect if the King's friends should come back. The Duke of Brunswick at the head of the foreign army set out on his march, and issued his famous proclamation to the inhabitants of France. He demanded immediate and unconditional submission; he threatened with fire and sword every town, village, or hamlet, that should dare to defend itself; and finally, he swore that if the smallest violence or insult were done to the King or his family, the city of Paris should be handed over to military execution and absolute destruction. This insensate document bears marks in every line of the implacable hate and

burning thirst for revenge that consumed the aristocratic refugees. Only civil war can awaken such rage as Brunswick's manifesto betrayed. It was drawn up by the French nobles at Coblenz. He merely signed it. The reply to it was the memorable insurrection of the Tenth of August 1792. The King was thrown into prison, and the Legislative Assembly made way for the National Convention.

Robespierre's part in the great rising of August was only secondary. Only a few weeks before he had started a journal and written articles in a constitutional sense. M. d'Héricault believes a story that Robespierre's aim in this had been to have himself accepted as tutor for the young Dauphin. It is impossible to prove a negative, but we find great difficulty in believing that such a post could ever have been an object of Robespierre's ambition. Now and always he showed a rather singular preference for the substance of power over its glitter. He was vain and an egoist, but in spite of this, and in spite of his passion for empty phrases, he was not without a sense of reality.

The insurrection of the 10th of August, however, was the idea, not of Robespierre, but of a more commanding personage, who now became one of the foremost of the Jacobin chiefs. De Maistre, that ardent champion of reaction, found a striking argument for the presence of the divine hand in the Revolution, in the intense mediocrity of the revolutionary leaders. How could such men, he asked, have achieved such

results, if they had not been instruments of the directing will of heaven? Danton at any rate is above this caustic criticism. Danton was of the Herculean type of a Luther, though without Luther's deep vision of spiritual things; or a Chatham, though without Chatham's august majesty of life; or a Cromwell, though without Cromwell's calm steadfastness of patriotic purpose. His visage and port seemed to declare his character: dark overhanging brows; eyes that had the gleam of lightning; a savage mouth; an immense head; the voice of a Stentor. Madame Roland pictured him as a fiercer Sardanapalus. Artists called him Jove the Thunderer. His enemies saw in him the Satan of the Paradise Lost. He was no moral regenerator; the difference between him and Robespierre is typified in Danton's version of an old saying, that he who hates vices hates men. He was not free from that careless life-contemning desperation, which sometimes belongs to forcible natures. Danton cannot be called noble, because nobility implies a purity, an elevation, and a kind of seriousness which were not his. He was too heedless of his good name, and too blind to the truth that though right and wrong may be near neighbours, yet the line that separates them is of an awful sacredness. If Robespierre passed for a hypocrite by reason of his scruple, Danton seemed a desperado by his airs of 'immoral thoughtlessness.' But the world forgives much to a royal size, and Danton was one of the men who strike deep notes. He had that largeness of motive, fulness of nature,

and capaciousness of mind, which will always redeem a multitude of infirmities.

Though the author of some of the most tremendous and far-sounding phrases of an epoch that was only too rich in them, yet phrases had no empire over him; he was their master, not their dupe. Of all the men who succeeded Mirabeau as directors of the unchained forces, we feel that Danton alone was in his true element. Action, which poisoned the blood of such men as Robespierre, and drove such men as Vergniaud out of their senses with exaltation, was to Danton his native sphere. When France was for a moment discouraged, it was he who nerved her to new effort by the electrifying cry, '*We must dare, and again dare, and without end dare!*' If his rivals or his friends seemed too intent on trifles, too apt to confound side issues with the central aim of the battle, Danton was ever ready to urge them to take a juster measure:—'*When the edifice is all ablaze, I take little heed of the knaves who are pilfering the household goods; I rush to put out the flames.*' When base egoism was compromising a cause more priceless than the personality of any man, it was Danton who made them ashamed by the soul-inspiring exclamation, '*Let my name be blotted out and my memory perish, if only France may be free.*' The Girondins denounced the popular clubs of Paris as hives of lawlessness and outrage. Danton warned them that it were wiser to go to these seething societies and to guide them, than to waste breath in futile denunciation. 'A nation in revolution,' he cried

to them, in a superb figure, 'is like the bronze boiling and foaming and purifying itself in the cauldron. Not yet is the statue of Liberty cast. Fiercely boils the metal; have an eye on the furnace, or the flame will surely scorch you.' If there was murderous work below the hatches, that was all the more reason why the steersman should keep his hand strong and ready on the wheel, with an eye quick for each new drift in the hurricane, and each new set in the raging currents. This is ever the figure under which one conceives Danton—a Titanic shape doing battle with the fury of the seas, yielding while flood upon flood sweeps wildly over him, and then with unshaken foothold and undaunted front once more surveying the waste of waters, and striving with dexterous energy to force the straining vessel over the waters of the bar.

La Fayette had called the huge giant of popular force from its squalid lurking-places, and now he trembled before its presence, and fled from it shrieking, with averted hands. Marat thrust swords into the giant's half-unwilling grasp, and plied him with bloody incitement to slay hip and thigh, and so filled the land with a horror that has not faded from out of men's minds to this day. Danton instantly discerned that the problem was to preserve revolutionary energy, and still to persuade the insurgent forces to retire once more within their boundaries. Robespierre discerned this too, but he was paralysed and bewildered by his own principles, as the convinced doctrinaire is so apt to be amid the perplexities of practice. The teaching

of Rousseau was ever pouring like thin smoke among his ideas, and clouding his view of actual conditions. The Tenth of August produced a considerable change in Robespierre's point of view. It awoke him to the precipitous steepness of the slope down which the revolutionary car was rushing headlong. His faith in the infallibility of the people suffered no shock, but he was in a moment alive to the need of walking warily, and his whole march from now until the end, twenty-three months later, became timorous, cunning, and oblique. His intelligence seemed to move in subterranean tunnels, with the gleam of an equivocal premiss at one end, and the mist of a vague conclusion at the other.

The enthusiastic pedant, with his narrow understanding, his thin purism, and his idyllic sentimentalism, found that the summoning archangel of his paradise proved to be a ruffian with a pike. The shock must have been tremendous. Robespierre did not quail nor retreat; he only revised his notion of the situation. A curious interview once took place between him and Marat. Robespierre began by assuring the Friend of the People that he quite understood the atrocious demands for blood with which the columns of Marat's newspaper were filled, to be merely useful exaggerations of his real designs. Marat repelled the disparaging imputation of clemency and common sense, and talked in his familiar vein of poniarding brigands, burning despots alive in their palaces, and impaling the traitors of the Assembly

on their own benches. 'Robespierre,' says Marat, 'listened to me with affright; he turned pale and said nothing. The interview confirmed the opinion I had always had of him, that he united the integrity of a thoroughly honest man and the zeal of a good patriot, with the enlightenment of a wise senator, but that he was without either the views or the audacity of a real statesman.' The picture is instructive, for it shows us Robespierre's invariable habit of leaving violence and iniquity unrebuked; of conciliating the practitioners of violence and iniquity; and of contenting himself with an inward hope of turning the world into a right course by fine words. He had no audacity in Marat's sense, but he was no coward. He knew, as all these men knew, that almost from hour to hour he carried his life in his hand, yet he declined to seek shelter in the obscurity which saved such men as Sieyès. But if he had courage, he had not the initiative of a man of action. He invented none of the ideas or methods of the Revolution, not even the Reign of Terror, but he was very dexterous in accepting or appropriating what more audacious spirits than himself had devised and enforced. The pedant, cursed with the ambition to be a ruler of men, is a curious study. He would be glad not to go too far, and yet his chief dread is lest he be left behind. His consciousness of pure aims allows him to become an accomplice in the worst crimes. Suspecting himself at bottom to be a theorist, he hastens to clear his character as man of practice

by conniving at an enormity. Thus, in September 1792, a band of miscreants committed the grievous massacres in the prisons of Paris. Robespierre, though the best evidence goes to show that he not only did not abet the prison murders, but in his heart deplored them, yet after the event did not scruple to justify what had been done. This was the beginning of a long course of compliance with sanguinary misdeeds, for which Robespierre has been as hotly execrated as if he prompted them. We do not, for the moment, measure the relative degrees of guilt that attached to mere compliance on the one hand, and cruel origination on the other. But his position in the Revolution is not rightly understood, unless we recognise him as being in almost every case an accessory after the fact.

Between the fall of Lewis in 1792 and the fall of Robespierre in 1794, France was the scene of two main series of events. One set comprises the repulse of the invaders, the suppression of an extensive civil war, and the attempted reconstruction of a social framework. The other comprises the rapid phases of an internecine struggle of violent and short-lived factions. By an unhappy fatality, due partly to anti-democratic prejudice, and partly to men's unfailing passion for melodrama, the Reign of Terror has been popularly taken for the central and most important part of the revolutionary epic. This is nearly as absurd as it would be to make Gustave Flourens' manifestation of the Fifth of October, or the rising

of the Thirty-first of October, the most prominent features in a history of the war of French defence in our own day. In truth, the Terror was a mere episode; and just as the rising of October 1870 was due to Marshal Bazaine's capitulation at Metz, it is easy to see that, with one exception, every violent movement in Paris, from 1792 to 1794, was due to menace or disaster on the frontier. Every one of the famous days of Paris was an answer to some enemy without. The storm of the Tuileries on the Tenth of August, as we have already said, was the response to Brunswick's proclamation. The bloody days of September were the reaction of panic at the capture of Longwy and Verdun by the Prussians. The surrender of Cambrai provoked the execution of Marie Antoinette. The defeat of Aix-la-Chapelle produced the abortive insurrection of the Tenth of March; and the treason of Dumouriez, the reverses of Custine, and the rebellion in La Vendée, produced the effectual insurrection of the Thirty-first of May 1793. The last of these two risings of Paris, headed by the Commune, against the Convention which was until then controlled by the Girondins, at length gave the government of France and the defence of the Revolution definitely over to the Jacobins. Their patriotic dictatorship lasted unbroken for a short period of ten months, and then the great party broke up into factions. The splendid triumphs of the dictatorship have been, in England at any rate, too usually forgotten, and only the crimes of the factions

remembered. Robespierre's history unfortunately belongs to the less important battle.

II.

The Girondins were driven out of the Convention by the insurgent Parisians at the beginning of June 1793. The movement may be roughly compared to that of the Independents in our own Rebellion, when the army compelled the withdrawal of eleven of the Presbyterian leaders from the parliament; or, it may recall Pride's memorable Purge of the same famous assembly. Both cases illustrate the common truth that large deliberative bodies, be they never so excellent for purposes of legislation, and even for a general control of the executive government in ordinary times, are found to be essentially unfit for directing a military crisis. If there are any historic examples that at first seem to contradict such a proposition, it will be found that the bodies in question were close aristocracies, like the Great Council of Venice, or the Senate of Rome in the strong days of the Commonwealth; they were never the creatures of popular election, with varying aims and a diversified political spirit. Modern publicists have substituted the divine right of assemblies for the old divine right of monarchies. Those who condone the violence done to the King on the Tenth of August, and even acquiesce in his execution five months afterwards, are relentless

against the violence done to the Convention on the Thirty-first of May. We confess ourselves unable to follow this transfer of the superstition of sacrosanctity from a king to a chamber. No doubt, the sooner a nation acquires a settled government, the better for it, provided the government be efficient. But if it be not efficient, the mischief of actively suppressing it may well be fully outweighed by the mischief of retaining it. We have no wish to smooth over the perversities of a revolutionary time; they cost a nation very dear; but if all the elements of the state are in furious convulsion and uncontrollable effervescence, then it is childish to measure the march of events by the standard of happier days of social peace and political order. The prospect before France at the violent close of Girondin supremacy was as formidable as any nation has ever yet had to confront in the history of the world. Rome was not more critically placed when the defeat of Varro on the plain of Cannæ had broken up her alliances and ruined her army. The brave patriots of the Netherlands had no gloomier outlook at that dolorous moment when the Prince of Orange had left them, and Alva had been appointed to bring them back by rapine, conflagration, and murder, under the loathed yoke of the Spanish tyrant.

Let us realise the conditions that Robespierre and Danton and the other Jacobin leaders had now to face. In the north-west one division of the fugitive Girondins was forming an army at Caen; in the

south-west another division was doing the same at Bordeaux. Marseilles and Lyons were rallying all the disaffected and reactionary elements in the south-east. La Vendée had flamed out in wild rebellion for Church and King. The strong places on the north frontier, and the strong places on the east, were in the hands of the foreign enemy. The fate of the Revolution lay in the issue of a struggle between Paris, with less than a score of departments on her side, and all the rest of France and the whole European coalition marshalled against her. And even this was not the worst. In Paris itself a very considerable proportion of its half-million of inhabitants were disaffected to the revolutionary cause. Reactionary historians dwell on the fact that such risings as that of the Tenth of August were devised by no more than half of the sections into which Paris was divided. It was common, they say, for half a dozen individuals to take upon themselves to represent the fourteen or fifteen hundred other members of a section. But what better proof can we have that if France was to be delivered from restored feudalism and foreign spoliation, the momentous task must be performed by those who had sense to discern the awful peril, and energy to encounter it?

The Girondins had made their incapacity plain. The execution of the King had filled them with alarm, and with hatred against the ruder and more robust party who had forced that startling act of vengeance upon them. Puny social disgusts prevented them

from co-operating with Danton or with Robespierre. Prussia and Austria were not more redoubtable or more hateful to them than was Paris, and they wasted, in futile recriminations about the September massacres or the alleged peculations of municipal officers, the time and the energy that should have been devoted without let or interruption to the settlement of the administration and the repulse of the foe. It is impossible to think of such fine characters as Vergniaud or Madame Roland without admiration, or of their untimely fate without pity. But the deliverance of a people beset by strong and implacable enemies could not wait on mere good manners and fastidious sentiments, when these comely things were in company with the most stupendous want of foresight ever shown by a political party. How can we measure the folly of men who so missed the conditions of the problem as to cry out in the Convention itself, almost within earshot of the Jacobin Club, that if any insult were offered to the national representation, the departments would rise, 'Paris would be annihilated; and men would come to search on the banks of the Seine whether such a city had ever existed!' It was to no purpose that Danton urgently rebuked the senseless animosity with which the Right poured incessant malediction on the Left, and the wild shrieking hate with which the Left retaliated on the Right. The battle was to the death, and it was the Girondins who first menaced their political foes with vengeance and the guillotine. As it happened, the treason of

Dumouriez and their own ineptitude destroyed them before revenge was within reach. Such a consummation was fortunate for their country. It was the Girondins whose want of union and energy had by the middle of 1793 brought France to distraction and imminent ruin. It was a short year of Jacobin government that by the summer of 1794 had welded the nation together again, and finally conquered the invasion. The city of the Seine had once more shown itself what it had been for nine centuries, ever since the days of Odo, Count of Paris and first King of the the French, not merely a capital, but France itself, 'its living heart and surest bulwark.'

The immediate instrument of so rapid and extraordinary an achievement was the Committee of Public Safety. The French have never shown their quick genius for organisation with more triumphant vigour. While the Girondins were still powerful, nine members of the Convention had been constituted an executive committee, April 6, 1793. They were in fact a kind of permanent cabinet, with practical irresponsibility. In the summer of 1793 the number was increased from nine to twelve, and these twelve were the centre of the revolutionary government. They fell into three groups. First, there were the scientific or practical administrators, of whom the most eminent was Carnot. Next came the directors of internal policy, the pure revolutionists, headed by Billaud de Varennes. Finally, there was a trio whose business it was to translate action into the phrases of

revolutionary policy. This famous group was Robespierre, Couthon, and Saint Just.

Besides the Committee of Public Safety there was another chief governmental committee, that of General Security. Its functions were mainly connected with the police, the arrests, and the prisons, but in all serious affairs the two Committees deliberated in common. There were also fourteen other groups of various size, taken from the Convention; they applied themselves with admirable zeal, and usually not with more zeal than skill, to schemes of public instruction, of finance, of legislation, of the administration of justice, and a host of other civil reforms, of all of which Napoleon Bonaparte was by and by to reap the credit. These bodies completed the civil revolution, which the Constituent and the Legislative Assemblies had left so mischievously incomplete that, as soon as ever the Convention had assembled, it was besieged by a host of petitioners praying them to explain and to pursue the abolition of the old feudal rights. Everything had still been left uncertain in men's minds, even upon that greatest of all the revolutionary questions. The feudal division of the committee of general legislation had in this eleventh hour to decide innumerable issues, from those of the widest practical importance, down to the prayer of a remote commune to be relieved from the charge of maintaining a certain mortuary lamp which had been a matter of seignorial obligation. The work done by the radical jurisconsults was never undone. It was

the great and durable reward of the struggle. And we have to remember that these industrious and efficient bodies, as well as all other public bodies and functionaries whatever, were placed by the definite revolutionary constitution of 1793 under the direct orders of the Committee of Public Safety.

It is hardly possible even now for any one who exults in the memory of the great deliverance of a brilliant and sociable people, to stand unmoved before the walls of that palace which Philibert Delorme reared for Catherine de' Medici, and which was thrown into ruin by the madness of a band of desperate men in our own days. Lewis had walked forth from the Tuileries on the fatal morning of the Tenth of August, holding his children by the hand, and lightly noticing, as he traversed the gardens, how early that year the leaves were falling. Lewis had by this time followed the fallen leaves into nothingness. The palace of the kings was now styled the Palace of the Nation, and the new republic carried on its work surrounded by the outward associations of the old monarchy. The Convention after the spring of 1793 held its sittings in what had formerly been the palace theatre. Fierce men from the Faubourgs of St. Antoine and St. Marceau, and fiercer women from the markets, shouted savage applause or menace from galleries, where not so long ago the Italian buffoons had amused the perpetual leisure of the finest ladies and proudest grandees of

France. The Committee of General Security occupied the Pavillon de Marsan, looking over a dingy space that the conqueror at Rivoli afterwards made the most dazzling street in Europe. The Committee of Public Safety sat in the Pavillon de Flore, at the opposite end of the Tuileries on the river bank. The approaches were protected by guns and by a body-guard, while inside there flitted to and fro a cloud of familiars, who have been compared by the enemies of the great Committee to the mutes of the court of the Grand Turk. Any one who had business with this awful body had to grope his way along gloomy corridors, that were dimly lighted by a single lamp at either end. The room in which the Committee sat round a table of green cloth was incongruously gay with the clocks, the bronzes, the mirrors, the tapestries, of the ruined court. The members met at eight in the morning and worked until one; from one to four they attended the sitting of the Convention. In the evening they met again, and usually sat until night was far advanced. It was no wonder if their hue became cadaverous, their eyes hollow and bloodshot, their brows stern, their glance preoccupied and sinister. Between ten and eleven every evening a sombre piece of business was transacted, which has half effaced in the memory of posterity all the heroic industry of the rest of the twenty-four hours. It was then that Fouquier-Tinville, the public prosecutor, brought an account of his day's labour; how the revolutionary tribunal was working, how many had

been convicted and how many acquitted, how large or how small had been the batch of the guillotine since the previous night. Across the breadth of the gardens, beyond their trees and fountains, stood the Monster itself, with its cruel symmetry, its colour as of the blood of the dead, its unheeding knife, neutral as the Fates.

Robespierre has been held responsible for all the violences of the revolutionary government, and his position on the Committee appeared to be exceedingly strong. It was, however, for a long time much less strong in reality than it seemed: all depended upon successfully playing off one force against another, and at the same time maintaining himself at the centre of the see-saw. Robespierre was the literary and rhetorical member of the band; he was the author of the strident manifestoes in which Europe listened with exasperation to the audacious hopes and unfaltering purpose of the new France. This had the effect of investing him in the eyes of foreign nations with supreme and undisputed authority over the government. The truth is, that Robespierre was both disliked and despised by his colleagues. They thought of him as a mere maker of useful phrases; he in turn secretly looked down upon them, as the man who has a doctrine and a system in his head always looks down upon the man who lives from hand to mouth. If the Committee had been in the place of a government which has no opposition to fear, Robespierre would have been one of its least powerful members.

But although the government was strong, there were at least three potent elements of opposition even within the ranks of the dominant revolutionary party itself.

Three bodies in Paris were, each of them, the centre of an influence that might at any moment become the triumphant rival of the Committee of Public Safety. These bodies were, first, the Convention; second, the Commune of Paris; and thirdly, the Jacobin Club. The jealousy thus existing outside the Committee would have made any failure instantly destructive. At one moment, at the end of 1793, it was only the surrender of Toulon that saved the Committee from a hostile motion in the Convention, and such a motion would have sent half of them to the guillotine. They were reviled by the extreme party who ruled at the Town Hall for not carrying the policy of extermination far enough. They were reproached by Danton and his powerful section for carrying that policy too far. They were discredited by the small band of intriguers, like Bazire, who identified government with peculation. Finally, they were haunted by the shadow of a fear, which events were by and by to prove only too substantial, lest one of their military agents on the frontier should make himself their master. The key to the struggle of the factions between the winter of 1793 and the revolution of the summer of 1794 is the vigorous resolve of the governing Committees not to part with power. The drama is one of the most exciting in the history

of faction; it abounds in rapid turns and unexpected shifts, upon which the student may spend many a day and many a night, and after all he is forced to leave off in despair of threading an accurate way through the labyrinth of passion and intrigue. The broad traits of the situation, however, are tolerably simple. The difficulty was to find a principle of government which the people could be induced to accept. 'The rights of men and the new principles of liberty and equality,' Burke said, 'were very unhandy instruments for those who wished to establish a system of tranquillity and order. The factions,' he added with fierce sarcasm, 'were to accomplish the purposes of order, morality, and submission to the laws, from the principles of atheism, profligacy, and sedition. They endeavoured to establish distinctions, by the belief of which they hoped to keep the spirit of murder safely bottled up and sealed for their own purposes, without endangering themselves by the fumes of the poison which they prepared for their enemies.' This is a ferocious and passionate version, but it is substantially not an unreal account of the position.

Upon one point all parties agreed, and that was the necessity of founding the government upon force, and force naturally meant Terror. Their plea was that of Dido to Ilioneus and the stormbeaten sons of Dardanus, when they complained that her people had drawn the sword upon them, and barbarously denied the hospitality of the sandy shore:—

> Res dura et regni novitas me talia cogunt
> Moliri.

And that pithy chapter in Machiavelli's *Prince* which treats of cruelty and clemency, and whether it be better to be loved or feared, anticipates the defence of the Terrorists, in the maxim that for a new prince it is impossible to avoid the name of cruel, because all new states abound in many perils. The difference arose on the question when Terror should be considered to have done as much of its work as it could be expected to do. This difference again was connected with difference of conception as to the type of the society which was ultimately to emerge from the existing chaos. Billaud-Varennes, the guiding spirit of the Committees, was without any conception of this kind. He was a man of force pure and simple. Danton was equally untouched by dreams of social transformation; his philosophy, so far as he had a definite philosophy, was, in spite of one or two inconsistent utterances, materialistic: and materialism, when it takes root in a sane, perspicacious, and indulgent character, as in the case of Danton, and, to take a better-known example, in the case of Jefferson, usually leads to a sound and positive theory of politics; chimeras have no place in it, though a rational social hope has the first place of all. Neither Danton nor Billaud expected a millennium; their only aim was to shape France into a coherent political personality, and the war between them turned upon the policy of prolonging the Terror after the frontiers

had been saved and the risings in the provinces put down. There were, however, two parties who took the literature of the century in earnest; they thought that the hour had struck for translating, one of them, the sentimentalism of Rousseau, the other of them, the rationality of Voltaire and Diderot, into terms of politics that should form the basis of a new social life. The strife between the faction of Robespierre and the faction of Chaumette was the reproduction, under the shadow of the guillotine, of the great literary strife of a quarter of a century before between Jean Jacques and the writers whom he contemptuously styled Holbachians. The battle of the books had become a battle between bands of infuriated men. The struggle between Hébert and Chaumette and the Common Council of Paris on the one part, and the Committee and Robespierre on the other, was the concrete form of the deepest controversy that lies before modern society. Can the social union subsist without a belief in God? Chaumette answered Yes, and Robespierre cried No. Robespierre followed Rousseau in thinking that any one who should refuse to recognise the existence of a God, should be exiled as a monster devoid of the faculties of virtue and sociability. Chaumette followed Diderot, and Diderot told Samuel Romilly in 1783 that belief in God, as well as submission to kings, would be at an end all over the world in a very few years. The Hébertists might have taken for their motto Diderot's shocking couplet, if they could have known it, about using

Les entrailles du prêtre
Au défaut d'un cordon pour étrangler les rois.

The theists and the atheists, Chaumette and Robespierre, each of them accepted the doctrine that it was in the power of the armed legislator to impose any belief and any rites he pleased upon the country at his feet. The theism or the atheism of the new France depended, as they thought, on the issue of the war for authority between the Hébertists in the Common Council of Paris, and the Committee of Public Safety. That was the religious side of the attitude of the government to the opposition, and it is the side that possesses most historic interest. Billaud cared very little for religion in any way; his quarrel with the Commune and with Hébert was political. What Robespierre's drift appears to have been, was to use the political animosity of the Committee as a means of striking foes, against whom his own animosity was not only political but religious also.

It would doubtless show a very dull apprehension of the violence and confusion of the time, to suppose that even Robespierre, with all his love for concise theories, was accustomed to state his aim to himself with the definite neatness in which it appears when reduced to literary statement. Pedant as he was, he was yet enough of a politician to see the practical urgency of restoring material order, whatever spiritual belief or disbelief might accompany it. The prospect of a rallying point for material order was incessantly

changing; and Robespierre turned to different quarters in search of it almost from week to week. He was only able to exert a certain limited authority over his colleagues in the government, by virtue of his influence over the various sections of possible opposition, and this was a moral, and not an official, influence. It was acquired not by marked practical gifts, for in truth Robespierre did not possess them, but by his good character, by his rhetoric, and by the skill with which he kept himself prominently before the public eye. The effective seat of his power, notwithstanding many limits and incessant variations, was the Jacobin Club. There a speech from him threw his listeners into ecstasies, that have been disrespectfully compared to the paroxysms of Jansenist convulsionaries, or the hysterics of Methodist negroes on a cotton plantation. We naturally think of those grave men who a few years before had founded the republic in America. Jefferson served with Washington in the Virginian legislature and with Franklin in Congress, and he afterwards said that he never heard either of them speak ten minutes at a time; while John Adams declared that he never heard Jefferson utter three sentences together. Of Robespierre it is stated on good authority that for eighteen months there was not a single evening on which he did not make to the assembled Jacobins at least one speech, and that never a short one.

Strange as it may seem, Robespierre's credit with this grim assembly was due to his truly Philistine

respectability and to his literary faculty. He figured as the philosopher and bookman of the party: the most iconoclastic politicians are usually willing to respect the scholar, provided they are sure of his being on their side. Robespierre had from the first discountenanced the fantastic caprices of some too excitable allies. He distrusted the noisy patriots of the middle class, who curried favour with the crowd by clothing themselves in coarse garments, clutching a pike, and donning the famous cap of red woollen, which had been the emblem of the emancipation of a slave in ancient Rome. One night at the Jacobin Club, Robespierre mounted the tribune, dressed with his usual elaborate neatness, and still wearing powder in his hair. An onlooker unceremoniously planted on the orator's head the red cap demanded by revolutionary etiquette. Robespierre threw the sacred symbol on the ground with a severe air, and then proceeded with a discourse of much austerity. Not that he was averse to a certain seemly decoration, or to the embodiment of revolutionary sentiment by means of a symbolism that strikes our cooler imagination as rather puerile. He was as ready as others to use the arts of the theatre for the liturgy of patriots. One of the most touching of all the minor dramatic incidents of the Revolution was the death of Barra. This was a child of thirteen who enrolled himself as a drummer, and marched with the Blues to suppress the rebel Whites in La Vendée. One day he advanced too close to the enemy's post, intrepidly beating the

charge. He was surrounded, but the peasant soldiers were loth to strike. 'Cry *Long live the King!*' they shouted, 'or else death!' 'Long live the Republic!' was the poor little hero's answer, as a ball pierced his heart. Robespierre described the incident to the Convention, and amid prodigious enthusiasm demanded that the body of the young martyr of liberty should be transported to the Pantheon with special pomp, and that David, the artist of the Revolution, should be charged with the duty of devising and embellishing the festival. As it happened, the arrangements were made for the ceremony to take place on the Tenth of Thermidor—a day on which Robespierre and all Paris were concerned about a celebration of bloodier import. Thermidor, however, was still far off; and the red sun of Jacobin enthusiasm seemed as if it would shine unclouded for ever.

Even at the Jacobins, however, popular as he was, Robespierre felt every instant the necessity of walking cautiously. He was as far removed as possible from that position of Dictator which some historians with a wearisome iteration persist in ascribing to him, even at the moment when they are enumerating the defeats which the party of Hébert was able to inflict upon him in the very bosom of the Mother Club itself. They make him the sanguinary dictator in one sentence, and the humiliated intriguer in the next. The latter is much the more correct account of the two, if we choose to call a man an intriguer who was honestly anxious to suppress what he considered a wicked

faction, and yet had need of some dexterity to keep his own head upon his shoulders.

In the winter of 1793 the Municipal party, guided by Hébert and Chaumette, made their memorable attempt to extirpate Christianity in France. The doctrine of D'Holbach's supper-table had for a short space the arm of flesh and the sword of the temporal power on its side. It was the first appearance of dogmatic atheism in Europe as a political force. This makes it one of the most remarkable moments in the Revolution, just as it makes the Revolution itself the most remarkable moment in modern history. The first political demonstration of atheism was attended by some of the excesses, the folly, the extravagances that stained the growth of Christianity. On the whole it is a very mild story compared with the atrocities of the Jewish records or the crimes of Catholicism. The worst charge against the party of Chaumette is that they were intolerant, and the charge is deplorably true; but this charge cannot lie in the mouth of persecuting churches.

Historical recriminations, however, are not very edifying. It is perfectly fair when Catholics talk of the atheist Terror, to rejoin that the retainers of Anjou and Montpensier slew more men and women on the first day of the Saint Bartholomew than perished in Paris through the Years I. and II. But the retort does us no good beyond the region of dialectic; it rather brings us down to the level of the

poor sectaries whom it crushes. Let us raise ourselves into clearer air. The fault of the atheist is that they knew no better than to borrow the maxims of the churchmen; and even those who agree with the dogmatic denials of the atheists—if such there be—ought yet to admit that the mere change from superstition to reason is a small gain, if the conclusions of reason are still to be enforced by the instruments of superstition. Our opinions are less important than the spirit and temper with which they possess us, and even good opinions are worth very little unless we hold them in a broad, intelligent, and spacious way. Now some of the opinions of Chaumette were full of enlightenment and hope. He had a generous and vivid faith in humanity, and he showed the natural effect of abandoning belief in another life by his energetic interest in arrangements for improving the lot of man in this life. But it would be far better to share the superstitious opinions of a virtuous and benignant priest like the Bishop in Victor Hugo's *Misérables*, than to hold those good opinions of Chaumette as he held them, with a rancorous intolerance, a reckless disregard of the rights and feelings of others, and a shallow forgetfulness of all that great and precious part of our natures that lies out of the immediate domain of the logical understanding. One can understand how an honest man would abhor the darkness and tyranny of the Church. But then to borrow the same absolutism in the interests of new light, was inevitably to bring the new light into the

same abhorrence as had befallen the old system of darkness. And this is exactly what happened. In every family where a mother sought to have her child baptized, or where sons and daughters sought to have the dying spirit of the old consoled by the last sacrament, there sprang up a bitter enemy to the government which had closed the churches and proscribed the priests.

How could a society whose spiritual life had been nourished in the solemn mysticism of the Middle Ages, suddenly turn to embrace a gaudy paganism? The common self-respect of humanity was outraged by apostate priests who, whether under the pressure of fear of Chaumette, or in a very superfluity of folly and ectasy of degradation, hastened to proclaim the charlatanry of their past lives, as they filed before the Convention, led by the Archbishop of Paris, and accompanied by rude acolytes bearing piles of the robes and the vessels of silver and gold with which they had once served their holy offices. 'Our enemies,' Voltaire had said, 'have always on their side the fat of the land, the sword, the strong box, and the *canaille*.' For a moment all these forces were on the other side, and it is deplorable to think that they were as much abused by their new masters as by the old. The explanation is that the destructive party had been brought up in the schools of the ecclesiastical party, and their work was a mere outbreak of mutiny, not a grave and responsible attempt to lead France to a worthier faith. If, as Chaumette

believed, mankind are the only Providence of men, surely in that faith more than in any other are we bound to be very solicitous not to bring the violent hand of power on any of the spiritual acquisitions of the race, and very patient in dealing with the slowness of the common people to leave their outworn creeds.

Instead of defying the Church by the theatrical march of the Goddess of Reason under the great sombre arches of the Cathedral of Our Lady, Chaumette should have found comfort in a firm calculation of the conditions. 'You,' he might have said to the priests,—'you have so debilitated the minds of men and women by your promises and your dreams, that many a generation must come and go before Europe can throw off the yoke of your superstition. But we promise you that they shall be generations of strenuous battle. We give you all the advantages that you can get from the sincerity and pious worth of the good and simple among you. We give you all that the bad among you may get by resort to the poisoned weapons of your profession and its traditions,—its bribes to mental indolence, its hypocritical affectations in the pulpit, its tyranny in the closet, its false speciousness in the world, its menace at the deathbed. With all these you may do your worst, and still humanity will escape you; still the conscience of the race will rise away from you; still the growth of brighter ideals and a nobler purpose will go on, leaving ever further and further behind them your dwarfed finality and leaden moveless

stereotype. We shall pass you by on your flank; your fieriest darts will only spend themselves on air. We will not attack you as Voltaire did; we will not exterminate you; we shall explain you. History will place your dogma in its class, above or below a hundred competing dogmas, exactly as the naturalist classifies his species. From being a conviction, it will sink to a curiosity; from being the guide to millions of human lives, it will dwindle down to a chapter in a book. As History explains your dogma, so Science will dry it up; the conception of law will silently make the conception of the daily miracle of your altars seem impossible; the mental climate will gradually deprive your symbols of their nourishment, and men will turn their backs on your system, not because they have confuted it, but because, like witchcraft or astrology, it has ceased to interest them. The great ship of your Church, once so stout and fair and well laden with good destinies, is become a skeleton ship; it is a phantom hulk, with warped planks and sere canvas, and you who work it are no more than ghosts of dead men, and at the hour when you seem to have reached the bay, down your ship will sink like lead or like stone to the deepest bottom.'

Alas, the speculation of the century had not rightly attuned men's minds to this firm confidence in the virtue of liberty, sounding like a bell through all distractions. None of these high things were said. The temples were closed, the sacred symbols defiled, the

priests maltreated, the worshippers dispersed. The Commune of Paris imitated the policy of the King of France who revoked the Edict of Nantes, and democratic atheism parodied the dragonnades of absolutist Catholicism.

Robespierre was unutterably outraged by the proceedings of the atheists. They perplexed him as a politician intent upon order, and they afflicted him sorely as an ardent disciple of the Savoyard Vicar. Hébert, however, was so strong that it needed some courage to attack him, nor did Robespierre dare to withstand him to the face. But he did not flinch from making an energetic assault upon atheism and the excesses of its partisans. His admirers usually count his speech of the Twenty-first of November one of the most admirable of his oratorical successes. The Sphinx still sits inexorable at our gates, and his words have lost none of their interest. 'Every philosopher and every individual,' he said, 'may adopt whatever opinion he pleases about atheism. Any one who wishes to make such an opinion into a crime is an insensate; but the public man or the legislator who should adopt such a system, would be a hundred times more insensate still. The National Convention abhors it. The Convention is not the author of a scheme of metaphysics. It was not to no purpose that it published the Declaration of the Rights of Man in presence of the Supreme Being. I shall be told perhaps that I have a narrow intelligence, that I

am a man of prejudice, and a fanatic. I have already said that I spoke neither as an individual nor as a philosopher with a system, but as a representative of the people. *Atheism is aristocratic. The idea of a great being who watches over oppressed innocence and punishes triumphant crime is essentially the idea of the people.* This is the sentiment of Europe and the Universe; it is the sentiment of the French nation. That people is attached neither to priests, nor to superstition, nor to ceremonies; it is attached only to worship in itself, or in other words to the idea of an incomprehensible Power, the terror of wrongdoers, the stay and comfort of virtue, to which it delights to render words of homage that are all so many anathemas against injustice and triumphant crime.'

This is Robespierre's favourite attitude, the priest posing as statesman. Like others, he declares the Supreme Power incomprehensible, and then describes him in terms of familiar comprehension. He first declares atheism an open choice, and then he brands it with the most odious epithet in the accepted vocabulary of the hour. Danton followed practically the same line, though saying much less about it. 'If Greece,' he said in the Convention, 'had its Olympian games, France too shall solemnise her sans-culottid days. The people will have high festivals; they will offer incense to the Supreme Being, to the master of nature; for we never intended to annihilate the reign of superstition in order to set up the reign of atheism. . . . If we have not honoured the priest of

error and fanaticism, neither do we wish to honour the priest of incredulity: we wish to serve the people. I demand that there shall be an end of these anti-religious masquerades in the Convention.'

There was an end of the masquerading, but the Hébertists still kept their ground. Danton, Robespierre, and the Committee were all equally impotent against them for some months longer. The revolutionary force had been too strong to be resisted by any government since the Paris insurgents had carried both King and Assembly in triumph from Versailles in the October of 1789. It was now too strong for those who had begun to strive with all their might to build a new government out of the agencies that had shattered the old to pieces. For some months the battle which had been opened by Robespierre's remonstrance against atheistic intolerance, degenerated into a series of masked skirmishes. The battle-ground of rival principles was overshadowed by the baleful wings of the genius of demonic Hate. *Vexilla regis prodeunt inferni;* the banners of the King of the Pit came forth. The scene at the Cordeliers for a time became as frantic as a Council of the Early Church settling the true composition of the Holy Trinity. Or it recalls the fierce and bloody contentions between Demos and Oligarchy in an old Greek town. We think of the day in the harbour of Corcyra when the Athenian admiral who had come to deliver the people, sailed out to meet the Spartan enemy, and on turning round to see if his Corcyrean allies were following,

saw them following indeed, but the crew of every ship striving in enraged conflict with one another. Collot D'Herbois had come back in hot haste from Lyons, where, along with Fouché, he had done his best to carry out the decree of the Convention, that not one stone of the city should be left on the top of another, and that even its very name should cease from the lips of men. Carrier was recalled from Nantes, where his feats of ingenious massacre had rivalled the exploits of the cruellest and maddest of the Roman Emperors. The presence of these men of blood gave new courage and resolution to the Hébertists. Though the alliance was informal, yet as against Danton, Camille Desmoulins, and the rest of the Indulgents, as well as against Robespierre, they made common cause.

Camille Desmoulins attacked Hébert in successive numbers of a journal that is perhaps the one truly literary monument of this stage of the revolution. Hébert retaliated by impugning the patriotism of Desmoulins in the Club, and the unfortunate wit, notwithstanding the efforts of Robespierre on his behalf, was for a while turned out of the sacred precincts. The power of the extreme faction was shown in relation to other prominent members of the party whom they loved to stigmatise by the deadly names of Indulgent and Moderantist. Even Danton himself was attacked (December 1793), and the integrity of his patriotism brought into question. Robespierre made an energetic defence of his great rival in the

hierarchy of revolution, and the defence saved Danton from the mortal ignominy of expulsion from the communion of the orthodox. On the other hand, Anacharsis Clootz, that guileless ally of the party of delirium, was less fortunate. Robespierre assailed the cosmopolitan for being a German baron, for having four thousand pounds a year, and for striking his sansculottism some notes higher than the regular pitch. Even M. Louis Blanc calls this an iniquity, and sets it down as the worst page in Robespierre's life. Others have described Robespierre as struck at this time by the dire malady of kings—hatred of the Idea. It seems, however, a hard saying that devotion to the Idea is to extinguish common sense. Clootz, notwithstanding his simple and disinterested character, and his possession of some rays of the modern illumination, was one of the least sane of all the men who in the exultation of their silly gladness were suddenly caught up by that great wheel of fire. All we can say is that Robespierre's bitter demeanour towards Clootz was ungenerous; but then this is only natural in him. Robespierre often clothed cool policy in the semblance of clemency, but I cannot hear in any phrase he ever used, or see in any measure he ever proposed, the mark of true generosity; of kingliness of spirit, not a trace. He had no element of ready and cordial propitiation, an element that can never be wanting in the greatest leaders in time of storm. If he resisted the atrocious proposals to put Madame Elizabeth to death, he was thinking not of

mercy or justice, but of the mischievous effect that her execution would have upon the public opinion of Europe, and he was so unmanly as to speak of her as *la méprisable sœur de Louis XVI.* Such a phrase is the disclosure of an abject stratum in his soul.

Yet this did not prevent him from seeing and denouncing the bloody extravagances of the Proconsuls, the representatives of Parisian authority in the provinces; nor from standing firm against the execution of the Seventy-Three, who had been bold enough to question the purgation of the National Convention on the Thirty-first of May. But the return of Collot d'Herbois made the situation more intricate. Collot was by his position the ally of Billaud, and to attack him, therefore, was to attack the most powerful member of the Committee of Public Safety. Billaud was too formidable. He was always the impersonation of the ruder genius of the Revolution, and the incarnation of the philosophy of the Terror, not as a delirium, but as a piece of deliberate policy. His pale, sober, and concentrated physiognomy seemed a perpetual menace. He had no gifts of speech, but his silence made people shudder, like the silence of the thunder when the tempest rages at its height. It was said by contemporaries that if Vadier was a hyæna, Barère a jackal, and Robespierre a cat, Billaud was a tiger.

The cat perceived that he was in danger of not having the tiger, jackal, and hyæna, on his side. Robespierre, in whom spasmodical courage and timid-

ity ruled by rapid turns, began to suspect that he had been premature; and a convenient illness, which some suppose to have been feigned, excused his withdrawal for some weeks from a scene where he felt that he could no longer see clear. We cannot doubt that both he and Danton were perfectly assured that the anarchic party must unavoidably roll headlong into the abyss. But the hour of doom was uncertain. To make a mistake in the right moment, to hurry the crisis, was instant death. Robespierre was a more adroit calculator than Danton. We must not confound his thin and querulous reserve with that stout and deep-browed patience, which may imply as superb a fortitude, and may demand as much iron control in a statesman, as the most heroic exploits of political energy. But his habit of waiting on force, instead of, like the other, taking the initiative with force, had trained his sight. The mixture of astuteness with his scruple, of egoistic policy with his stiffness for doctrine, gave him an advantage over Danton, that made his life worth exactly three months' more purchase than Danton's. It has been said that Spinozism or Transcendentalism in poetic production becomes Machiavellism in reflection: for the same reasons we may always expect sentimentalism in theory to become under the pressure of action a very self-protecting guile. Robespierre's mind was not rich nor flexible enough for true statesmanship, and it is a grave mistake to suppose that the various cunning tacks in which his career abounds, were any

sign of genuine versatility or resource or political growth and expansion. They were, in fact, the resort of a man whose nerves were weaker than his volition. Robespierre was a kind of spinster. Force of head did not match his spiritual ambition. He was not, we repeat, a coward in any common sense; in that case he would have remained quiet among the croaking frogs of the Marsh, and by and by have come to hold a portfolio under the first Consul. He did not fear death, and he envied with consuming envy those to whom nature had given the qualities of initiative. But his nerves always played him false. The consciousness of having to resolve to take a decided step alone, was the precursor of a fit of trembling. His heart did not fail, but he could not control the parched voice, nor the twitching features, not the ghastly palsy of inner misgiving. In this respect Robespierre recalls a more illustrious man; we think of Cicero tremblingly calling upon the Senate to decide for him whether he should order the execution of the Catilinarian conspirators. It is to be said, however, in his favour that he had the art, which Cicero lacked, to hide his pusillanimity. Robespierre knew himself, and did his best to keep his own secret.

His absence during the final crisis of the anarchic party allowed events to ripen, without committing him to that initiative in dangerous action which he had dreaded on the Tenth of August, as he dreaded it on every other decisive day of this burning time.

The party of the Commune became more and more daring in their invectives against the Convention and the Committees. At length they proclaimed open insurrection. But Paris was cold, and opinion was divided. In the night of the Thirteenth of March, Hébert, Chaumette, Clootz, were arrested. The next day Robespierre recovered sufficiently to appear at the Jacobin Club. He joined his colleagues of the Committee of Public Safety in striking the blow. On the Twenty-fourth of March the Ultra-Revolutionist leaders were beheaded.

The first bloody breach in the Jacobin ranks was speedily followed by the second. The Right wing of the opposition to the Committee soon followed the Left down the ways to dusty death, and the execution of the Anarchists only preceded by a week the arrest of the Moderates. When the seizure of Danton had once before been discussed in the Committee, Robespierre resisted the proposal violently. We have already seen how he defended Danton at the Jacobin Club, when the Club underwent the process of purification in the winter. What produced this sudden tack? How came Robespierre to assent in March to a violence which he had angrily discountenanced in February? There had been no change in the policy or attitude of Danton himself. The military operations against the domestic and foreign enemies were no sooner fairly in the way of success, than Danton began to meditate in serious earnest the consolidation of a republican system of law and

justice. He would fain have stayed the Terror. 'Let us leave something,' he said, 'to the guillotine of opinion.' He aided, no doubt, in the formation of the Revolutionary Tribunal, but this was exactly in harmony with his usual policy of controlling popular violence without alienating the strength of popular sympathy. The process of the tribunal was rough and summary, but it was fairer—until Robespierre's Law of Prairial—than people usually suppose, and it was the very temple of the goddess of Justice herself compared with the September massacres. 'Let us prove ourselves terrible,' Danton said, 'to relieve the people from the necessity of being so.' His activity had been incessant in urging and superintending the great levies against the foreigner; he had gone repeatedly on distant and harassing expeditions, as the representative of the Convention at the camps on the frontier. In the midst of all this he found time to press forward measures for the instruction of the young, and for the due appointment of judges, and his head was full of ideas for the construction of a permanent executive council. It was this which made him eager for a cessation of the method of Terror, and it was this which made the Committee of Public Safety his implacable enemy.

Why, then, did Robespierre, who also passed as a man of order and humanity, not continue to support Danton after the suppression of the Hébertists, as he had supported him before? The common and facile answer is that he was moved by a malignant desire

to put a rival out of the way. On the whole, the evidence seems to support Napoleon's opinion that Robespierre was incapable of voting for the death of anybody in the world on grounds of personal enmity. And his acquiescence in the ruin of Danton is intelligible enough on the grounds of selfish policy. The Committee hated Danton for the good reason that he had openly attacked them, and his cry for clemency was an inflammatory and dangerous protest against their system. Now Robespierre, rightly or wrongly, had made up his mind that the Committee was the instrument by which, and which only, he could work out his own vague schemes of power and reconstruction. And, in any case, how could he resist the Committee? The famous insurrectionary force of Paris, which Danton had been the first to organise against a government, had just been chilled by the fall of the Hébertists. Least of all could this force be relied upon to rise in defence of the very chief whose every word for many weeks past had been a protest against the Communal leaders. In separating himself from the Ultras, Danton had cut off the great reservoir of his peculiar strength.

It may be said that the Convention was the proper centre of resistance to the designs of the Committee, and that if Danton and Robespierre had united their forces in the Convention they would have defeated Billaud and his allies. This seems to us more than doubtful. The Committee had acquired an immense preponderance over the Convention. They had been

eminently successful in the immense tasks imposed upon them. They had the prestige not only of being the government—so great a thing in a country that had just emerged from the condition of a centralised monarchy; they had also the prestige of being a government that had done its work triumphantly. We are now in March. In July we shall find that Robespierre adopted the very policy that we are now discussing, of playing off the Convention against the Committee. In July that policy ended in his headlong fall. Why should it have been any more successful four months earlier?

What we may say is, that Robespierre was bound in all morality to defend Danton in the Convention at every hazard. Possibly so; but then to run risks for chivalry's sake was not in Robespierre's nature, and no man can climb out beyond the limitations of his own character. His narrow head and thin blood and instable nerve, his calculating humour and his frigid egoism, disinclined him to all games of chance. His apologists have sought to put a more respectable colour on his abandonment of Danton. The precisian, they say, disapproved of Danton's lax and heedless courses. Danton said to him one day:—'What do I care? Public opinion is a strumpet, and posterity a piece of nonsense.' How should the puritanical lawyer endure such cynicism as this? And Danton delighted in inflicting these coarse shocks. Again, Danton had given various gross names of contempt to Saint Just. Was Robespierre not to feel insults

offered to the ablest and most devoted of his lieutenants? What was more important than all, the acclamations with which the partisans of reaction greeted the fall of the Ultras, made it necessary to give instant and unmistakable notice to the foes of the Revolution that the goddess of the scorching eye and fiery hand still grasped the axe of her vengeance.

These are pleas invented after the fact. All goes to show that Robespierre was really moved by nothing more than his invariable dread of being left behind, of finding himself on the weaker side, of not seeming practical and political enough. And having made up his mind that the stronger party was bent on the destruction of the Dantonists, he became fiercer than Billaud himself. It is constantly seen that the waverer, of nervous atrabiliar constitution, no sooner overcomes the agony of irresolution, than he flings himself on his object with a vindictive tenacity that seems to repay him for all the moral humiliation inflicted on him by his stifled doubts. He redeems the slowness of his approach by the fury of his spring. 'Robespierre,' says M. d'Héricault, 'precipitated himself to the front of the opinion that was yelling against his friends of yesterday. In order to keep his usual post in the van of the Revolution, in order to secure the advantage to his own popularity of an execution which the public voice seemed to demand, he came forward as the author of that execution, though only the day before he had hesitated about its utility, and though it was, in truth far less use-

ful to him than it proved to be to his future antagonists.'

Robespierre first alarmed Danton's friends by assuming a certain icy coldness of manner, and by some menacing phrases about the faction of the so-called Moderates. Danton had gone, as he often did, to his native village of Arcis-sur-Aube, to seek repose and a little clearness of sight in the night that wrapped him about. He was devoid of personal ambition; he never had any humour for mere factious struggles. His, again, was the temperament of violent force, and in such types the reaction is always tremendous. The indomitable activity of the last twenty months had bred weariness of spirit. The nemesis of a career of strenuous Will in large natures is apt to be a sudden sense of the irony of things. In Danton, as with Byron it happened afterwards, the vehemence of the revolutionary spirit was touched by this desolating irony. His friends tried to rouse him. It is not clear that he could have done anything. The balance of force, after the suppression of the Hébertists, was irretrievably against him, as calculation had already revealed to Robespierre.

There are various stories of the pair having met at dinner almost on the eve of Danton's arrest, and parting with sombre disquietude on both sides. The interview, with its champagne, its interlocutors, its play of sinister repartee, may possibly have taken place, but the alleged details are plainly apocryphal. After all, 'Religion ist in der Thiere Trieb,' says

Wallenstein; 'the very savage drinks not with the victim, into whose breast he means to plunge a sword.' Danton was warned that Robespierre was plotting his arrest. 'If I thought he had the bare idea,' said Danton with something of Gargantuan hyperbole, 'I would eat his bowels out.' Such was the disdain with which the 'giant of the mighty bone and bold emprise' thought of our meagre-hearted pedant. The truth is that in the stormy and distracted times of politics, and perhaps in all times, contempt is a dangerous luxury. A man may be a very poor creature, and still have a faculty for mischief. And Robespierre had this faculty in the case of Danton. With singular baseness, he handed over to Saint Just a collection of notes, to serve as material for the indictment which Saint Just was to present to the Convention. They comprised everything that suspicion could interpret malignantly, from the most conspicuous acts of Danton's public life, down to the casual freedom of private discourse.

Another infamy was to follow. After the arrest, and on the proceedings to obtain the assent of the Convention to the trial of Danton and others of its members, one only of their friends had the courage to rise and demand that they should be heard at the bar. Robespierre burst out in cold rage; he asked whether they had undergone so many heroic sacrifices, counting among them these acts of 'painful severity,' only to fall under the yoke of a band of domineering intriguers; and he cried out impatiently that they

would brook no claim of privilege, and suffer no rotten idol. The word was felicitously chosen, for the Convention dreaded to have its independence suspected, and it dreaded this all the more because at this time its independence did not really exist. The vote against Danton was unanimous, and the fact that it was so is the deepest stain on the fame of this assembly. On the afternoon of the Sixteenth Germinal (April 5, 1794) Paris in amazement and some stupefaction saw the once-dreaded Titan of the Mountain fast bound in the tumbril, and faring towards the sharp-clanging knife. 'I leave it all in a frightful welter,' Danton is reported to have said. 'Not a man of them has an idea of government. Robespierre will follow me; he is dragged down by me. Ah, better be a poor fisherman than meddle with the governing of men!'

Let us pause for a moment over a calmer reminiscence. This was the very day on which the virtuous and high-minded Condorcet quitted the friendly roof that for nine months had concealed him from the search of proscription. The same week he was found dead in his prison. While Danton was storming with impotent thunder before the tribunal, Condorcet was writing those closing words of his Sketch of Human Progress, which are always so full of strength and edification. 'How this picture of the human race freed from all its fetters,—withdrawn from the empire of chance, as from that of the enemies

of progress, and walking with firm and assured step in the way of truth, of virtue, and happiness, presents to the philosopher a sight that consoles him for the errors, the crimes, the injustice, with which the earth is yet stained, and of which he is not seldom the victim! It is in the contemplation of this picture that he receives the reward of his efforts for the progress of reason, for the defence of liberty. He ventures to link them with the eternal chain of the destinies of man: it is there he finds the true recompense of virtue, the pleasure of having done a lasting good; fate can no longer undo it, by any disastrous compensation that shall restore prejudice and bondage. This contemplation is for him a refuge, into which the recollection of his persecutors can never follow him; in which, living in thought with man reinstated in the rights and the dignity of his nature, he forgets man tormented and corrupted by greed, by base fear, by envy: it is here that he truly abides with his fellows, in an elysium that his reason has known how to create for itself, and that his love for humanity adorns with all purest delights.'

In following the turns of the drama which was to end in the tragedy of Thermidor, we perceive that after the fall of the anarchists and the death of Danton, the relations between Robespierre and the Committees underwent a change. He, who had hitherto been on the side of government, became in turn an agency of opposition. He did this in the

interest of ultimate stability, but the difference between the new position and the old is that he now distinctly associated the idea of a stable republic with the ascendency of his own religious conceptions. How far the ascendency of his own personality was involved, we have no means of judging. The vulgar accusation against him is that he now deliberately aimed at a dictatorship, and began to plot with that end in view. It is always the most difficult thing in the world to draw a line between mere arrogant egoism on the one hand, and on the other the identification of a man's personal elevation with the success of his public cause. The two ends probably become mixed in his mind, and if the cause be a good one, it is the height of pharisaical folly to quarrel with him, because he desires that his authority and renown shall receive some of the lustre of a far-shining triumph. What we complain of in Napoleon Bonaparte, for instance, is not that he sought power, but that he sought it in the interests of a coarse, brutal, and essentially unmeaning personal ambition. And so of Robespierre. We need not discuss the charge that he sought to make himself master. The important thing is that his mastery could have served no great end for France; that it would have been like himself, poor, barren, and hopelessly mediocre. And this would have been seen on every side. France had important military tasks to perform before her independence was assured. Robespierre hated war, and was jealous of every victory. France was in

urgent need of stable government, of new laws, of ordered institutions. Robespierre never said a word to indicate that he had a single positive idea in his head on any of these great departments. And, more than this, he was incapable of making use of men who were more happily endowed than himself. He had never mastered that excellent observation of De Retz, that of all the qualities of a good party chief, none is so indispensable as being able to suppress on many occasions, and to hide on all, even legitimate suspicions. He was corroded by suspicion, and this paralyses able servants. Finally, Robespierre had no imperial quality of soul, but only that very sorry imitation of it, a lively irritability.

The base of Robespierre's schemes of social reconstruction now came clearly into view; and what a base! An official Supreme Being, and a regulated Terror. The one was to fill up the spiritual void, and the other to satisfy all the exigencies of temporal things. It is to the credit of Robespierre's perspicacity that he should have recognised the human craving for religion, but this credit is as naught when we contemplate the jejune thing that passed for religion in his dim and narrow understanding. Rousseau had brought a new soul into the eighteenth century by the Savoyard Vicar's Profession of Faith, the most fervid and exalted expression of emotional deism that religious literature contains; vague, irrational, incoherent, cloudy; but the clouds are suffused with glowing gold. When we turn from that to the political version of it in Robes-

pierre's discourse on the relations of religious and moral ideas with republican principles, we feel as one who revisits a landscape that had been made glorious to him by a summer sky and fresh liquid winds from the gates of the evening sun, only to find it dead under a gray heaven and harsh blasts from the north-east. Robespierre's words on the Supreme Being are never a brimming stream of deep feeling; they are a literary concoction: never the self-forgetting expansion of the religious soul, but only the composite of the rhetorician. He thought he had a passion for religion; what he took for religion was little more than mental decorum. We do not mean that he was insincere, or that he was without a feeling for high things. But here, as in all else, his aspiration was far beyond his faculty; he yearned for great spiritual emotions, as he had yearned for great thoughts and great achievements, but his spiritual capacity was as scanty and obscure as his intelligence. And where unkind Nature thus unequally yokes lofty objects in a man with a short mental reach, she stamps him with the very definition of mediocrity.

How can we speak with decent patience of a man who seriously thought that he should conciliate the conservative and theological elements of the society at his feet, by such an odious opera-piece as the Feast of the Supreme Being? This was designed as a triumphant ripost to the Feast of Reason, which Chaumette and his friends had celebrated in the winter. The energumens of the Goddess of Reason

had now been some weeks in their bloody graves; by this time, if they had given the wrong answer to the supreme enigma, their eyes would perhaps be opened. Robespierre persuaded the Convention to decree an official recognition of the Supreme Being, and to attend a commemorative festival in honour of their mystic patron. He contrived to be chosen president for the decade in which the festival would fall. When the day came (20th Prairial, June 8, 1794), he clothed himself with more than even his usual care. As he looked out from the windows of the Tuileries upon the jubilant crowd in the gardens, he was intoxicated with enthusiasm. 'O Nature,' he cried, 'how sublime thy power, how full of delight! How tyrants must grow pale at the idea of such a festival as this!' In pontifical pride he walked at the head of the procession, with flowers and wheat-ears in his hand, to the sound of chants and symphonies and choruses of maidens. On the first of the great basins in the gardens, David, the artist, had devised an allegorical structure for which an inauspicious doom was prepared. Atheism, a statue of life size, was throned in the midst of an amiable group of human Vices, with Madness by her side, and Wisdom menacing them with lofty wrath. Great are the perils of symbolism. Robespierre applied a torch to Atheism, but alas, the wind was hostile, or else Atheism and Madness were damp. They obstinately resisted the torch, and it was hapless Wisdom who took fire. Her face, all blackened by smoke, grinned a hideous ghastly grin at her sturdy

rivals. The miscarriage of the allegory was an evil omen, and men probably thought how much better the churchmen always managed their conjurings and the art of spectacle. There was a great car drawn by milk-white oxen; in the front were ranged sheaves of golden grain, while at the back shepherds and shepherdesses posed with scenic graces. The whole mummery was pagan. It was a bringing back of Cerealia and Thesmophoria to earth. It stands as the most disgusting and contemptible anachronism in history.

The famous republican Calendar, with its Prairials and Germinals, its Ventoses and Pluvioses, was an anachronism of the same kind, though it was less despicable in its manifestation. Its philosophic base was just as retrograde and out of season as the fooleries of the Feast of the Supreme Being. The association of worship and sacredness with the fruits of the earth, with the forces of nature, with the power and variety of the elements, could only be sincere so long as men really thought of all these things as animated each by a special will of its own. Such an association became mere charlatanry, when knowledge once passed into the positive stage. How could men go back to adore an outer world, after they had found out the secret that it is a mere huge group of phenomena, following fixed courses, and not obeying spontaneous and unaccountable volitions of their own? And what could be more puerile than the fanciful connection of the Supreme Being with a pastoral simplicity of life? This simplicity was gone, irrecoverably gone, with

the passage from nomad times to the complexities of a modern society. To typify, therefore, the Supreme Being as specially interested in shocks of grain and in shepherds and shepherdesses was to make him a mere figure in an idyll, the ornament of a rural mask, a god of the garden, instead of the sovereign director of the universal forces, and stern master of the destinies of men. Chaumette's commemoration of the Divinity of Reason was a sensible performance, compared with Robespierre's farcical repartee. It was something, as Comte has said, to select for worship man's most individual attribute. If they could not contemplate society as a whole, it was at least a gain to pay homage to that faculty in the human rulers of the world, which had brought the forces of nature—its pluviosity, nivosity, germinality, and vendemiarity—under the yoke for the service of men.

If the philosophy of Robespierre's pageant was so retrograde and false, its politics were still more inane. It is a monument of presumptuous infatuation that any one should feel so strongly as he did that order could only be restored on condition of coming to terms with religious use and prejudice, and then that he should dream that his Supreme Being—a mere didactic phrase, the deity of a poet's georgic—should adequately replace that eternal marvel of construction, by means of which the great churchmen had wrought dogma and liturgy and priest and holy office into every hour and every mood of men's lives. There is no binding principle of human association in a creed

with this one bald article. 'In truth,' as I have said elsewhere of such deism as Robespierre's, 'one can scarcely call it a creed. It is mainly a name for a particular mood of fine spiritual exaltation; the expression of a state of indefinite aspiration and supreme feeling for lofty things. Are you going to convert the new barbarians of our western world with this fair word of emptiness? Will you sweeten the lives of suffering men, and take its heaviness from that droning piteous chronicle of wrong and cruelty and despair, which everlastingly saddens the compassionating ear like moaning of a midnight sea; will you animate the stout of heart with new fire, and the firm of hand with fresh joy of battle, by the thought of a being without intelligible attributes, a mere abstract creation of metaphysic, whose mercy is not as our mercy, nor his justice as our justice, nor his fatherhood as the fatherhood of men? It was not by a cold, a cheerless, a radically depraving conception such as this, that the church became the refuge of humanity in the dark times of old, but by the representation, to men sitting in bondage and confusion, of godlike natures moving among them, under figure of the most eternally touching of human relations,—a tender mother ever interceding for them, and an elder brother laying down his life that their burdens might be loosened.'

On the day of the Feast of the Supreme Being, the guillotine was concealed in the folds of rich hangings.

It was the Twentieth of Prairial. Two days later Couthon proposed to the Convention the memorable Law of the Twenty-second Prairial. Robespierre was the draftsman, and the text of it still remains in his own writing. This monstrous law is simply the complete abrogation of all law. Of all laws ever passed in the world it is the most nakedly iniquitous. Tyrants have often substituted their own will for the ordered procedure of a tribunal, but no tyrant before ever went through the atrocious farce of deliberately making a tribunal the organised negation of security for justice. Couthon laid its theoretic base in a fallacy that must always be full of seduction to shallow persons in authority: 'He who would subordinate the public safety to the inventions of jurisconsults, to the formulas of the Court, is either an imbecile or a scoundrel.' As if public safety could mean anything but the safety of the public. The author of the Law of Prairial had forgotten the minatory word of the sage to whom he had gone on a pilgrimage in the days of his youth. 'All becomes legitimate and even virtuous,' Helvétius had written, 'on behalf of the public safety.' Rousseau inscribed on the margin, 'The public safety is nothing, unless individuals enjoy security.' What security was possible under the Law of Prairial?

After the probity and good judgment of the tribunal, the two cardinal guarantees in state trials are accurate definition, and proof. The offence must be capable of precise description, and the proof against

an offender must conform to strict rule. The Law of Prairial violently infringed all three of these essential conditions of judicial equity. First, the number of the jury who had power to convict was reduced. Second, treason was made to consist in such vague and infinitely elastic kinds of action as inspiring discouragement, misleading opinion, depraving manners, corrupting patriots, abusing the principles of the Revolution by perfidious applications. Third, proof was to lie in the conscience of the jury; there was an end of preliminary inquiry, of witnesses in defence, and of counsel for the accused. Any kind of testimony was evidence, whether material or moral, verbal or written, if it was of a kind 'likely to gain the assent of a man of reasonable mind.'

Now what was Robespierre's motive in devising this infernal instrument? The theory that he loved judicial murder for its own sake, can only be held by the silliest of royalist or clerical partisans. It is like the theory of the vulgar kind of Protestantism, that Mary Tudor or Philip of Spain had a keen delight in shedding blood. Robespierre, like Mary and like Philip, would have been as well pleased if all the world would have come round to his mind without the destruction of a single life. The true inquisitor is a creature of policy, not a man of blood by taste. What, then, was the policy that inspired the Law of Prairial? To us the answer seems clear. We know what was the general aim in Robespierre's mind at this point in the history of the Revolution. His

brother Augustin was then the representative of the Convention with the army of Italy, and General Bonaparte was on terms of close intimacy with him. Bonaparte said long afterwards, when he was expiating a life of iniquity on the rock of Saint Helena, that he saw long letters from Maximilian to Augustin Robespierre, all blaming the Conventional Commissioners —Tallien, Fouché, Barras, Collot, and the rest—for the horrors they perpetrated, and accusing them of ruining the Revolution by their atrocities. Again, there is abundant testimony that Robespierre did his best to induce the Committee of Public Safety to bring those odious malefactors to justice. The text of the Law itself discloses the same object. The vague phrases of depraving manners and applying revolutionary principles perfidiously, were exactly calculated to smite the band of violent men whose conduct was to Robespierre the scandal of the Revolution. And there was a curious clause in the law as originally presented, which deprived the Convention of the right of preventing measures against its own members. Robespierre's general design in short was to effect a further purgation of the Convention. There is no reason to suppose that he deliberately aimed at any more general extermination. On the other hand, it is incredible that, as some have maintained, he should merely have had in view the equalisation of rich and poor before the tribunals, by withdrawing the aid of counsel and testimony to civic character from both rich and poor alike.

If Robespierre's design was what we believe it to have been, the result was a ghastly failure. The Committee of Public Safety would not consent to apply his law against the men for whom he had specially designed it. The frightful weapon which he had forged was seized by the Committee of General Security, and Paris was plunged into the fearful days of the Great Terror. The number of persons put to death by the Revolutionary Tribunal before the Law of Prairial had been comparatively moderate. From the creation of the tribunal in April 1793, down to the execution of the Hébertists in March 1794, the number of persons condemned to death was 505. From the death of the Hébertists down to the death of Robespierre, the number of the condemned was 2158. One half of the entire number of victims, namely, 1356, were guillotined after the Law of Prairial. No deadlier instrument was ever invented by the cruelty of man. Innocent women no less than innocent men, poor no less than rich, those in whom life was almost spent, no less than those in whom its pulse was strongest, virtuous no less than vicious, were sent off in woe-stricken batches all those summer days. A man was informed against; he was seized in his bed at five in the morning; at seven he was taken to the Conciergerie; at nine he received information of the charge against him; at ten he went into the dock; by two in the afternoon he was condemned; by four his head lay in the executioner's basket.

What stamps the system of the Terror at this date

with a wickedness that cannot be effaced, is that at no moment was the danger from foreign or domestic foe less serious. We may always forgive something to well-grounded panic. The proscriptions of an earlier date in Paris were not excessively sanguinary, if we remember that the city abounded in royalists and other reactionists, who were really dangerous in fomenting discouragement and spreading confusion. If there ever is an excuse for martial law, and it must be rare, the French government were warranted in resorting to it in 1793. Paris in those days was like a city beleaguered, and the world does not use very harsh words about the commandant of a besieged town who puts to death traitors found within his walls. Opinion in England at this very epoch encouraged the Tory government to pass a Treason Bill, which introduced as vague a definition of treasonable offence as even the Law of Prairial itself. Windham did not shrink from declaring in parliament that he and his colleagues were determined to exact 'a rigour beyond the law.' And they were as good as their word. The Jacobins had no monopoly either of cruel law or cruel breach of law in the eighteenth century. Only thirty years before, opinion in Pennsylvania had prompted a hideous massacre of harmless Indians as a deed acceptable to God, and the grandson of William Penn proclaimed a bounty of fifty dollars for the scalp of a female Indian, and three times as much for a male. A man would have had quite as good a chance of justice from the Revolutionary Tribunal,

as at the hands of Braxfield, the Scotch judge, who condemned Muir and Palmer for sedition in 1793, and who told the government, with a brazen front worthy of Carrier or Collot d'Herbois themselves, that, if they would only send him prisoners, he would find law for them.

We have no sympathy with the spirit of paradox that has arisen in these days, amusing itself by the vindication of bad men. We think that the author of the Law of Prairial was a bad man. But it is time that there should be an end of the cant which lifts up its hands at the crimes of republicans and freethinkers, and shuts its eyes to the crimes of kings and churches. Once more, we ought to rise into a higher air; we ought to condemn, wherever we find it, whether on the side of our adversaries or on our own, all readiness to substitute arbitrary force for the processes of ordered justice. There are moments when such a readiness may be leniently judged, but Prairial of 1794 was not one of them either in France or in England. And what makes the crime of this law more odious, is its association with the official proclamation of the State worship of a Supreme Being. The scene of Robespierre's holy festival becomes as abominable as a catholic Auto-da-fé, where solemn homage was offered to the God of pity and loving-kindness, while flame glowed round the limbs of the victims.

Robespierre was inflamed with resentment, not

because so many people were guillotined every day, but because the objects of his own enmity were not among them. He was chagrined at the miscarriage of his scheme; but the chagrin had its root in his desire for order, and not in his humanity. A good man—say so imperfectly good a man as Danton—could not have endured life, after enacting such a law, and seeing the ghastly work that it was doing. He could hardly have contented himself with drawing tears from the company in Madame Duplay's little parlour, by his pathetic recitations from Corneille and Racine, or with listening to melting notes from the violin of Le Bas. It is commonly said by Robespierre's defenders that he withdrew from the Committee of Public Safety, as soon as he found out that he was powerless to arrest the daily shedding of blood. The older assumption used to be that he left Paris, and ceased to be cognisant of the Committee's deliberations. The minutes, however, prove that this was not the case. Robespierre signed papers nearly every day of Messidor—(June 19 to July 18) the blood-stained month between Prairial and Thermidor—and was thoroughly aware of the doings of the Committee. His partisans have now fallen back on the singular theory of what they style moral absence. He was present in the flesh, but standing aloof in the spirit. His frowning silence was a deadlier rebuke to the slayers and oppressors than secession. Unfortunately for this ingenious explanation of the embarrassing fact of a merciful man standing silent

before merciless doings, there are at least two facts that show its absurdity.

First, there is the affair of Catherine Théot. Catherine Théot was a crazy old woman of a type that is commoner in protestant than in catholic countries. She believed herself to have special gifts in the interpretation of the holy writings, and a few other people as crazy as herself chose to accept her pretensions. One revelation vouchsafed to her was to the effect that Robespierre was a Messiah and the new redeemer of the human race. The Committee of General Security resolved to indict this absurd sect. Vadier,—one of the roughest of the men whom the insurrections of Paris had brought to the front—reported on the charges to the Convention (27 Prairial, June 15), and he took the opportunity to make Robespierre look profoundly ridiculous. The unfortunate Messiah sat on his bench, gnawing his lips with bitter rage, while, amid the sneers and laughter of the Convention, the officers brought to the bar the foolish creatures who had called him the Son of God. His thin pride and prudish self-respect were unutterably affronted, and he quite understood that the ridicule of the mysticism of Théot was an indirect pleasantry upon his own Supreme Being. He flew to the Committee of Public Safety, angrily reproached them for permitting the prosecution, summoned Fouquier-Tinville, and peremptorily ordered him to let the matter drop. In vain did the public prosecutor point out that there was a decree of the Convention ordering

him to proceed. Robespierre was inexorable. The Committee of General Security were baffled, and the prosecution ended. 'Lutteur impuissant et fatigué,' says M. Hamel, the most thoroughgoing defender of Robespierre, upon this, 'il va se retirer, moralement du moins.' Impotent and wearied! But he had just won a most signal victory for good sense and humanity. Why was it the only one? If Robespierre was able to save Théot, why could he not save Cécile Renault?

Cécile Renault was a young seamstress who was found one evening at the door of Robespierre's lodging, calling out in a state of exaltation that she would fain see what a tyrant looked like. She was arrested, and upon her were found two little knives used for the purposes of her trade. That she should be arrested and imprisoned was natural enough. The times were charged with deadly fire. People had not forgotten that Marat had been murdered in his own house. Only a few days before Cécile Renault's visit to Robespierre, an assassin had fired a pistol at Collot d'Herbois on the staircase of his apartment. We may make allowance for the excitement of the hour, and Robespierre had as much right to play the martyr, as had Lewis the Fifteenth after the incident of Damiens' rusty pen-knife. But the histrionic exigencies of the chief of a faction ought not to be pushed too far. And it was a monstrous crime that because Robespierre found it convenient to pose as sacrificial victim at the Club, therefore he should have had no scruple in seeing not only the wretched Cécile, but her father,

her aunt, and one of her brothers, all despatched to the guillotine in the red shirt of parricide, as agents of Pitt and Coburg, and assassins of the father of the land. This was exactly two days after he had shown his decisive power in the affair of the religious illuminists. The only possible conclusion open to a plain man after weighing and putting aside all the sophisms with which this affair has been obscured, is that Robespierre interfered in the one case because its further prosecution would have tended to make him ridiculous, and he did not interfere in the other, because the more exaggerated, the more melodramatic, the more murderous it was made, the more interesting an object would he seem in the eyes of his adorers.

The second fact bearing on Robespierre's humanity is this. He had encouraged the formation and stimulated the activity of popular commissions, who should provide victims for the Revolutionary Tribunal. On the Second of Messidor (June 20) a list containing one hundred and thirty-eight names was submitted for the ratification of the Committee. The Committee endorsed the bloody document, and the last signature of the endorsement is that of him, who had resigned a post in his youth rather than be a party to putting a man to death As was observed at the time, Robespierre in doing this, suppressed his pique against his colleagues, in order to take part in a measure, that was a sort of complement to his Law of Prairial.

From these two circumstances, then, even if there

were no other, we are justified in inferring that Robespierre was struck by no remorse at the thought that it was his law which had unbound the hands of the horrible genie of civil murder. His mind was wholly absorbed in the calculations of a frigid egoism. His intelligence, as we have always to remember, was very dim. He only aimed at one thing at once, and that was seldom anything very great or far-reaching. He was a man of peering and obscured vision in face of practical affairs. In passing the Law of Prairial, his designs—and they were meritorious and creditable designs enough in themselves—had been directed against the corrupt chiefs, such as Tallien and Fouché, and against the fierce and coarse spirits of the Committee of General Security, such as Vadier and Voulland. Robespierre was above all things a precisian. He had a sentimental sympathy with the common people in the abstract, but his spiritual pride, his pedantry, his formalism, his personal fastidiousness, were all wounded to the very quick by the kind of men whom the Revolution had thrown to the surface. Gouverneur Morris, then the American minister, describes most of the members of the two Committees as the very dregs of humanity, with whom it is a stain to have any dealings; as degraded men only worthy of the profoundest contempt. Danton had said: 'Robespierre is the least of a scoundrel of any of the band.' The Committee of General Security represented the very elements by which Robespierre was most revolted. They offended

his respectability; their evil manners seemed to tarnish that good name which his vanity hoped to make as revered all over Europe, as it already was among his partisans in France. It was indispensable therefore to cut them off from the revolutionary government, just as Hébert and as Danton had been cut off. His colleagues of Public Safety refused to lend themselves to this. Henceforth, with characteristically narrow tenacity, he looked round for new combinations, but, so far as I can see, with no broader design than to enable him to punish these particular objects of his very just detestation.

The position of sections and interests which ended in the Revolution of Thermidor, is one of the most extraordinarily intricate and entangled in the history of faction. It would take a volume to follow out all the peripeteias of the drama. Here we can only enumerate in a few sentences the parties to the contest and the conditions of the game. The reader will easily discern the difficulty in Robespierre's way of making an effective combination. First, there were the two Committees. Of these the one, the General Security, was thoroughly hostile to Robespierre; its members, as we have said, were wild and hardy spirits, with no political conception, and with a great contempt for fine phrases and philosophical principles. They knew Robespierre's hatred for them, and they heartily returned it. They were the steadfast centre of the changing schemes which ended in his downfall. The Committee of Public Safety

was divided. Carnot hated Saint Just, and Collot d'Herbois hated Robespierre, and Billaud had a sombre distrust of Robespierre's counsels. Shortly speaking, the object of the Billaudists was to retain their power, and their power was always menaced from two quarters, the Convention and Paris. If they let Robespierre have his own way against his enemies, would they not be at his mercy whenever he chose to devise a popular insurrection against them? Yet if they withstood Robespierre, they could only do so through the agency of the Convention, and to fall back upon the Convention would be to give that body an express invitation to resume the power that had, in the pressure of the crisis a year before, been delegated to the Committee, and periodically renewed afterwards. The dilemma of Billaud seemed desperate, and events afterwards proved that it was so.

If we turn to the Convention, we find the position equally distracting. They, too, feared another insurrection and a second decimation. If the Right helped Robespierre to destroy the Fouchés and Vadiers, he would be stronger than ever; and what security had they against a repetition of the violence of the Thirty-first of May? If the Dantonists joined in destroying Robespierre, they would be helping the Right, and what security had they against a Girondin reaction? On the other hand, the Centre might fairly hope, just what Billaud feared, that if the Committee came to the Convention to crush Robespierre that would end in a combination strong

enough to enable the Convention to crush the Committees.

Much depended on military success. The victories of the generals were the great strength of the Committee. For so long it would be difficult to turn opinion against a triumphant administration. 'At the first defeat,' Robespierre had said to Barère, 'I await you.' But the defeat did not come. The plotting went on with incessant activity; on one hand, Robespierre, aided by Saint Just and Couthon, strengthening himself at the Jacobin Club, and through that among the sections; on the other, the Mountain and the Committee of General Security trying to win over the Right, more contemptuously christened the Marsh or the Belly, of the Convention. The Committee of Public Safety was not yet fully decided how to act.

At the end of the first week of Thermidor, Robespierre could endure the tension no longer. He had tried to fortify his nerves for the struggle by riding, but with so little success that he was lifted off his horse fainting. He endeavoured to steady himself by diligent pistol-practice. But nothing gave him initiative and the sinews of action. Saint Just urged him to raise Paris. Some bold men proposed to carry off the members of the Committee bodily from their midnight deliberations. Robespierre declined, and fell back on what he took to be his greatest strength and most unfailing resource; he prepared a speech. On the Eighth of Thermidor

he delivered it to the Convention, amid intense excitement both within its walls and without. All Paris knew that they were now on the eve of one more of the famous Days; the revolution of Thermidor had begun.

The speech of the Eighth Thermidor has seemed to men of all parties since a masterpiece of tactical ineptitude. If Robespierre had been a statesman instead of a phrasemonger, he had a clear course. He ought to have taken the line of argument that Danton would have taken. That is to say, he ought to have identified himself fully with the interests and security of the Convention; to have accepted the growing resolution to close the Terror; to have boldly pressed the abolition of the Committee of General Security, and the removal from the Committee of Public Safety of Billaud, Collot, Barère; to have proposed to send about fifty persons to Cayenne for life; and to have urged a policy of peace with the foreign powers. This was the substantial wisdom and real interest of the position. The task was difficult, because his hearers had the best possible reasons for knowing that the author of the Law of Prairial was a Terrorist on principle. And in truth we know that Robespierre had no definite intention of erecting clemency into a rule. He had not mental strength enough to throw off the profound apprehension, which the incessant alarms of the last five years had engendered in him; and the only device, that he could imagine for maintaining the republic against

traitors, was to stimulate the rigour of the Revolutionary Tribunal.

If, however, Robespierre lacked the grasp which might have made him the representative of a broad and stable policy, it was at least his interest to persuade the men of the Plain that he entertained no designs against them. And this is what in his own mind he intended. But to do it effectively, it was clearly best to tell his hearers, in so many words, whom he really wished them to strike. That would have relieved the majority, and banished the suspicion which had been busily fomented by his enemies, that he had in his pocket a long list of their names for proscription. But Robespierre, having for the first time in his life ventured on aggressive action without the support of a definite party, faltered. He dared not to designate his enemies face to face and by name. Instead of that, he talked vaguely of conspirators against the republic, and calumniators of himself. There was not a single bold, definite, unmistakable sentence in the speech from first to last. The men of the Plain were insecure and doubtful; they had no certainty that among conspirators and calumniators he did not include too many of themselves. People are not so readily seized by grand phrases, when their heads are at stake. The sitting was long, and marked by changing currents and reverses. When they broke up, all was left uncertain. Robespierre had suffered a check. Billaud felt that he could no longer hesitate in joining the combination against his colleague.

Each party was aware that the next day must seal the fate of one or other of them. There is a legend that in the evening Robespierre walked in the Champs Elysées with his betrothed, accompanied as usual by his faithful dog, Brount. They admired the purple of the sunset, and talked of the prospect of a glorious to-morrow. But this is apocryphal. The evening was passed in no lover's saunterings, but amid the storm and uproar of the Club. He went to the Jacobins to read over again his speech of the day. 'It is my testament of death,' he said, amid the passionate protestations of his devoted followers. He had been talking for the last three years of his willingness to drink the hemlock, and to offer his breast to the poniards of tyrants. That was a fashion of the speech of the time, and in earlier days it had been more than a fashion of speech, for Brunswick would have given them short shrift. But now, when he talked of his last testament, Robespierre did not intend it to be so if he could prevent it. When he went to rest that night, he had a tolerably calm hope that he should win the next day's battle in the Convention, when he was aware that Saint Just would attack the Committees openly and directly. If he would have allowed his band to invade the Pavillon de Flore, and carry off or slay the Committees who sat up through the night, the battle would have been won when he awoke. His friends are justified in saying that his strong respect for legality was the cause of his ruin.

Men in all ages have had a superstitious fondness for connecting awful events in their lives with portents and signs among the outer elements. It was noticed that the heat during the terrible days of Thermidor was more intense than had been known within the memory of man. The thermometer never fell below sixty-five degrees in the coolest part of the night, and in the daytime men and women and beasts of burden fell down dead in the streets. By five o'clock in the morning of the Ninth Thermidor, the galleries of the Convention were filled by a boisterous and excited throng. At ten o'clock the proceedings began as usual with the reading of correspondence from the departments and from the armies. Robespierre, who had been escorted from his lodgings by the usual body of admirers, instead of taking his ordinary seat, remained standing by the side of the tribune. It is a familiar fact that moments of appalling suspense are precisely those in which we are most ready involuntarily to note a trifle; everybody observed that Robespierre wore the coat of violet-blue silk and the white nankeens in which a few weeks previously he had done honour to the Supreme Being.

The galleries seemed as enthusiastic as ever. The men of the Plain and the Marsh had lost the abject mien with which they usually cowered before Robespierre's glance; they wore a courageous air of judicial reserve. The leaders of the Mountain wandered restlessly to and fro among the corridors. At noon Tallien saw that Saint Just had ascended the tribune.

Instantly he rushed down into the chamber, knowing that the battle had now begun in fierce earnest. Saint Just had not got through two sentences, before Tallien interrupted him. He began to insist with energy that there should be an end to the equivocal phrases with which Paris had been too long alarmed by the Triumvirate. Billaud, fearing to be outdone in the attack, hastily forced his way to the tribune, broke into what Tallien was saying, and proceeded dexterously to discredit Robespierre's allies without at once assailing Robespierre himself. Le Bas ran in a fury to stop him; Collot d'Herbois, the president, declared Le Bas out of order; the hall rang with cries of 'To prison! To the Abbey!' and Le Bas was driven from the tribune. This was the beginning of the tempest. Robespierre's enemies knew that they were fighting for their lives, and this inspired them with a strong and resolute power that is always impressive in popular assemblies. He still thought himself secure. Billaud pursued his accusations. Robespierre, at last, unable to control himself, scaled the tribune. There suddenly burst forth from Tallien and his partisans vehement shouts of 'Down with the tyrant! down with the tyrant!' The galleries were swept by a wild frenzy of vague agitation; the president's bell poured loud incessant clanging into the tumult; the men of the Plain held themselves firm and silent; in the tribune raged ferocious groups, Tallien menacing Robespierre with a dagger, Billaud roaring out proposals to arrest this person and that

Robespierre gesticulating, threatening, yelling, shrieking. His enemies knew that if he were once allowed to get a hearing, his authority might even yet overawe the waverers. A penetrative word or a heroic gesture might lose them the day. The majority of the chamber still hesitated. They called for Barère, in whose adroit faculty for discovering the winning side they had the confidence of long experience. Robespierre, recovering some of his calm, and perceiving now that he had really to deal with a serious revolt, again asked to be heard before Barère. But the cries for Barère were louder than ever. Barère spoke, in a sense hostile to Robespierre, but warily and without naming him.

Then there was a momentary lull. The Plain was uncertain. The battle might even now turn either way. Robespierre made another attempt to speak, but Tallien with intrepid fury broke out into a torrent of louder and more vehement invective. Robespierre's shrill voice was heard in disjected snatches, amidst the violent tones of Tallien, the yells of the president calling Robespierre to order, the murderous clanging of the bell. Then came that supreme hour of the struggle, whose tale has been so often told, when Robespierre turned from his old allies of the Mountain, and succeeded in shrieking out an appeal to the probity and virtue of the Right and the Plain. To his horror, even these despised men, after a slight movement, remained mute. Then his cheeks blanched, and the sweat ran down his face. But anger and scornful im-

patience swiftly came back and restored him. *President of assassins*, he cried out to Thuriot, *for the last time I ask to be heard. Thou canst not speak*, called one, *the blood of Danton chokes thee.* He flung himself down the steps of the tribune, and rushed towards the benches of the Right. *Come no further*, cried another, *Vergniaud and Condorcet sat here.* He regained the tribune, but his speech was gone. He was reduced to the dregs of an impotent and gasping voiceless gesticulation, like the strife of one in a nightmare.

The day was lost. The tension of a passionate and violent struggle prolonged for many hours always at length exasperates onlookers with something of the brute ferocity of the actors. The physical strain stirs the tiger in the blood; they conceive a cruel hatred against weakness, just as the heated throng of a Roman amphitheatre turned up their thumbs for the instant despatch of the unfortunate swordsman who had been too ready to lower his arms. The Right, the Plain, even the galleries, despised the man who had succumbed. If Robespierre had possessed the physical strength of Mirabeau or Danton, the Ninth Thermidor would have been another of his victories. He was crushed by the relentless ferocity and endurance of his antagonists. A decree for his arrest was resolved upon by acclamation. He cast a glance at the galleries, as marvelling that they should remain passive in face of an outrage on his person. They were mute. The ushers advanced with hesitation to do their duty, and not without trembling carried him away, along with

Couthon and Saint Just. The brother, for whom he had made honourable sacrifices in days that seemed to be divided from the present by an abyss of centuries, insisted with fine heroism on sharing his fate, and Augustin Robespierre and Le Bas were led off to the prisons along with their leader and idol.

It was now a little after four o'clock. The Convention, with the self-possession that so often amazes us in its proceedings, went on with formal business for another hour. At five they broke up. For life, as the poets tell, is a daily stage-play; men declaim their high heroic parts, then doff the buskin or the sock, wash away the paint from their cheeks, and gravely sit down to meat. The Conventionals, as they ate their dinners, were unconscious, apparently, that the great crisis of the drama was still to come. The next twelve hours were to witness the climax. Robespierre had been crushed by the Convention; it remained to be seen whether the Convention would not now be crushed by the Commune of Paris.

Robespierre was first conducted to the prisons of the Luxembourg. The gaoler, on some plea of informality, refused to receive him. The terrible prisoner was next taken to the Mairie, where he remained among joyful friends from eight in the evening until eleven. Meanwhile the old insurrectionary methods of the nights of June and of August in '92, of May and of June in '93, were again followed. The beating of the *rappel* and the *générale* was heard in all the sections; the tocsin sounded its dreadful note, remind-

ing all who should hear it that insurrection is the most sacred and the most indispensable of duties. Hanriot, the commandant of the forces, had been arrested in the evening, but he was speedily released by the agents of the Commune. The Council issued manifestoes and decrees from the Common Hall every moment. The barriers were closed. Cannon were posted opposite the doors of the hall of the Convention. The quays were thronged. Emissaries sped to and fro between the Jacobin Club and the Common Hall, and between these two centres and each of the forty-eight sections. It is one of the inscrutable mysteries of this delirious night, that Hanriot did not at once use the force at his command to break up the Convention. There is no obvious reason why he should not have done so. The members of the Convention had re-assembled after their dinner, towards seven o'clock. The hall which had resounded with the shrieks and yells of the furious gladiators of the factions all day, now lent a lugubrious echo to gloomy reports which one member after another delivered from the shadow of the tribune. Towards nine o'clock the members of the two dread Committees came in panic to seek shelter among their colleagues, 'as dejected in their peril,' says an eyewitness, 'as they had been cruel and insolent in the hour of their supremacy.' When they heard that Hanriot had been released, and that guns were at their door, all gave themselves up for lost and made ready for death. News came that Robespierre had broken his arrest,

and gone to the Common Hall. Robespierre, after urgent and repeated solicitations, had been at length persuaded about an hour before midnight to leave the Mairie and join his partisans of the Commune. This was an act of revolt against the Convention, for the Mairie was a legal place of detention, and so long as he was there, he was within the law. The Convention with heroic intrepidity declared both Hanriot and Robespierre beyond the pale of the law. This prompt measure was its salvation. Twelve members were instantly named to carry the decree to all the sections. With the scarf of office round their waists, and a sabre in hand, they sallied forth. Mounting horses, and escorted by attendants with flaring torches, they scoured Paris, calling all good citizens to the succour of the Convention, haranguing crowds at the street corners with power and authority, and striking the imaginations of men. At midnight heavy rain began to fall.

The leaders of the Commune meanwhile, in full confidence that victory was sure, contented themselves with incessant issue of paper decrees, to each of which the Convention replied by a counter-decree. Those who have studied the situation most minutely, are of opinion that even so late as one o'clock in the morning, the Commune might have made a successful defence, although it had lost the opportunity, which it had certainly possessed up to ten o'clock, of destroying ing the Convention. But on this occasion the genius of insurrection slumbered. And there was a genuine

division of opinion in the eastern quarters of Paris, the result of a grim distrust of the man who had helped to slay Hébert and Chaumette. At a word this distrust began to declare itself. The opinion of the sections became more and more distracted. One armed group cried, *Down with the Convention!* Another armed group cried, *The Convention for ever, and down with the Commune!* The two great faubourgs were all astir, and three battalions were ready to march. Emissaries from the Convention actually succeeded in persuading them—such the dementia of the night—that Robespierre was a royalist agent, and that the Commune were about to deliver the little Lewis from his prison in the Temple. One body of communist partisans after another was detached from its allegiance. The deluge of rain emptied the Place de Grève, and when companies came up from the sections in obedience to orders from Hanriot and the Commune, the silence made them suspect a trap, and they withdrew towards the great metropolitan church or elsewhere.

Barras, whom the Convention had charged with its military defence, gathered together some six thousand men. With the right instinct of a man who had studied the history of Paris since the July of 1789, he foresaw the advantage of being the first to make the attack. He arranged his forces into two divisions. One of them marched along the quays to take the Common Hall in front; the other along the Rue Saint Honoré to take it in flank. Inside the

Common Hall the staircases and corridors were alive with bustling messengers, and those mysterious busy-bodies who are always found lingering without a purpose on the skirts of great historic scenes. Robespierre and the other chiefs were in a small room, preparing manifestoes and signing decrees. They were curiously unaware of the movements of the Convention. An aggressive attack by the party of authority upon the party of insurrection was unknown in the tradition of revolt. They had an easy assurance that at daybreak their forces would be prepared once more to tramp along the familiar road westwards. It was now half-past two. Robespierre had just signed the first two letters of his name to a document before him, when he was startled by cries and uproar in the Place below. In a few instants he lay stretched on the ground, his jaw shattered by a pistol-shot. His brother had either fallen or had leaped out of the window. Couthon was hurled over a staircase, and lay for dead. Saint Just was a prisoner.

Whether Robespierre was shot by an officer of the Conventional force, or attempted to blow out his own brains, we shall never know, any more than we shall ever be quite assured how Rousseau, his spiritual master, came to an end. The wounded man was carried, a ghastly sight, first to the Committee of Public Safety, and then to the Conciergerie, where he lay in silent stupefaction through the heat of the summer day. As he was an outlaw, the only legal preliminary before execution was to identify him.

At five in the afternoon, he was raised into the cart Couthon and the younger Robespierre lay, confused wrecks of men, at the bottom of it. Hanriot and Saint Just, bruised, begrimed, and foul, completed the band. One who walks from the Palace of Justice, over the bridge, along the Rue Saint Honoré, into the Rue Royale, and so to the Luxor column, retraces the *via dolorosa* of the Revolution on the afternoon of the Tenth of Thermidor.

The end of the intricate manœuvres known as the Revolution of Thermidor was the recovery of authority by the Convention. The insurrections, known as the days of the Twelfth Germinal, First Prairial, and Thirteenth Vendémiaire, all ended in the victory of the Convention over the revolutionary forces of Paris. The Committees, on the other hand, had beaten Robespierre, but they had ruined themselves. Very gradually the movement towards order, which had begun in the mind of Danton, and had gone on in the cloudy purposes of Robespierre, became definite. But it was in the interest of very different ideas from those of either Danton or of Robespierre. A White Terror succeeded the Red Terror. Not at once, however; it was not until nine months after the death of Robespierre, that the reaction was strong enough to smite his colleagues of the two Committees. The surviving Girondins had come back to their seats in the Convention: the Dantonians had not forgiven the execution of their chief. These two parties were

bent on vengeance. In April, 1795, a decree was passed banishing Billaud de Varennes, Collot d'Herbois, and Barère. In the following month the leaders of the Committee of General Security were thrown into prison. The revolution had passed into new currents. We cannot see any reasons for thinking that those currents would have led to any happier results if Robespierre had won the battle. Tallien, Fouché, Barras, and the rest may have been thoroughly bad men. But then what qualities had Robespierre for building up a state? He had neither strength of practical character, nor firm breadth of political judgment, nor a sound social doctrine. When we compare him,—I do not say with Frederick of Prussia, with Jefferson, with Washington,—but with the group of able men who made the closing year of the Convention honourable and of good service to France, we have a measure of Robespierre's profound and pitiable incompetence.

CARLYLE.

THE new library edition of Mr. Carlyle's works may be taken for the final presentation of all that the author has to say to his contemporaries, and to possess the settled form in which he wishes his words to go to those of posterity who may prove to have ears for them. The canon is definitely made up. The golden Gospel of Silence is effectively compressed in thirty fine volumes. After all has been said about self-indulgent mannerisms, moral perversities, phraseological outrages, and the rest, these volumes will remain the noble monument of the industry, originality, conscientiousness, and genius of a noble character, and of an intellectual career that has exercised on many sides the profoundest sort of influence upon English feeling. Men who have long since moved far away from these spiritual latitudes, like those who still find an adequate shelter in them, can hardly help feeling as they turn the pages of the now disused pieces which they were once wont to ponder daily, that whatever later teachers may have done in definitely shaping opinion, in giving specific form to sentiment, and in subjecting

impulse to rational discipline, here was the friendly fire-bearer who first conveyed the Promethean spark, here the prophet who first smote the rock.

That with this sense of obligation to the master, there mixes a less satisfactory reminiscence of youthful excess in imitative phrases, in unseasonably apostolic readiness towards exhortation and rebuke, in interest about the soul, a portion of which might more profitably have been converted into care for the head, is in most cases true. A hostile observer of bands of Carlylites at Oxford and elsewhere might have been justified in describing the imperative duty of work as the theme of many an hour of strenuous idleness, and the superiority of golden silence over silver speech as the text of endless bursts of jerky rapture, while a too constant invective against cant had its usual effect of developing cant with a difference. To the incorrigibly sentimental all this was sheer poison, which continues tenaciously in the system. Others of robuster character no sooner came into contact with the world and its fortifying exigencies, than they at once began to assimilate the wholesome part of what they had taken in, while the rest falls gradually and silently out. When criticism has done its just work on the disagreeable affectations of many of Mr. Carlyle's disciples, and on the nature of Mr. Carlyle's opinions and their worth as specific contributions, very few people will be found to deny that his influence in stimulating moral energy, in kindling enthusiasm for virtues worthy of enthusiasm,

and in stirring a sense of the reality on the one hand, and the unreality on the other, of all that man can do or suffer, has not been surpassed by any teacher now living.

One of Mr. Carlyle's chief and just glories is, that for more than forty years he has clearly seen, and kept constantly and conspicuously in his own sight and that of his readers, the profoundly important crisis in the midst of which we are living. The moral and social dissolution in progress about us, and the enormous peril of sailing blindfold and haphazard, without rudder or compass or chart, have always been fully visible to him, and it is no fault of his if they have not become equally plain to his contemporaries. The policy of drifting has had no countenance from him. That a society should be likely to last with hollow and scanty faith, with no government, with a number of institutions hardly one of them real, with a horrible mass of poverty-stricken and hopeless subjects; that, if it should last, it could be regarded as other than an abomination of desolation, he has boldly and often declared to be things incredible. We are not promoting the objects which the social union subsists to fulfil, nor applying with energetic spirit to the task of preparing a sounder state for our successors. The relations between master and servant, between capitalist and labourer, between landlord and tenant, between governing race and subject race, between the feelings and intelligence of the legislature and the feelings

and intelligence of the nation, between the spiritual power, literary and ecclesiastical, and those who are under it—the anarchy that prevails in all these, and the extreme danger of it, have been with Mr. Carlyle a never-ending theme. What seems to many of us the extreme inefficiency or worse of his solutions, still allows us to feel grateful for the vigour and perspicacity with which he has pressed on the world the urgency of the problem.

The degree of durability which his influence is likely to possess with the next and following generations is another and rather sterile question, which we are not now concerned to discuss. The unrestrained eccentricities which Mr. Carlyle's strong individuality has precipitated in his written style may, in spite of the poetic fineness of his imagination, which no historian or humorist has excelled, still be expected to deprive his work of that permanence which is only secured by classic form. The incorporation of so many phrases, allusions, nicknames, that belong only to the hour, inevitably makes the vitality of the composition conditional on the vitality of these transient and accidental elements which are so deeply imbedded in it. Another consideration is that no philosophic writer, however ardently his words may have been treasured and followed by the people of his own time, can well be cherished by succeeding generations, unless his name is associated through some definable and positive contribution with the central march of European thought and

feeling. In other words, there is a difference between living in the history of literature or belief, and living in literature itself and in the minds of believers. Mr. Carlyle has been a most powerful solvent, but it is the tendency of solvents to become merely historic. The historian of the intellectual and moral movements of Great Britain during the present century, will fail egregiously in his task if he omits to give a large and conspicuous space to the author of *Sartor Resartus*. But it is one thing to study historically the ideas which have influenced our predecessors, and another thing to seek in them an influence fruitful for ourselves. It is to be hoped that one may doubt the permanent soundness of Mr. Carlyle's peculiar speculations, without either doubting or failing to share that warm affection and reverence which his personality has worthily inspired in many thousands of his readers. He has himself taught us to separate these two sides of a man, and we have learnt from him to love Samuel Johnson without reading much or a word that the old sage wrote. 'Sterling and I walked westward,' he says once, 'arguing copiously, but *except* in opinion not disagreeing.'

It is none the less for what has just been said a weightier and a rarer privilege for a man to give a stirring impulse to the moral activity of a generation, than to write in classic style; and to have impressed the spirit of his own personality deeply upon the minds of multitudes of men, than to have composed most of those works which the world is said not

willingly to let die. Nor, again, is to say that this higher renown belongs to Mr. Carlyle, to underrate the less resounding, but most substantial, services of a definite kind which he has rendered both to literature and history. This work may be in time superseded with the advance of knowledge, but the value of the first service will remain unimpaired. It was he, as has been said, 'who first taught England to appreciate Goethe;' and not only to appreciate Goethe, but to recognise and seek yet further knowledge of the genius and industry of Goethe's countrymen. His splendid drama of the French Revolution has done, and may be expected long to continue to do, more to bring before our slow-moving and unimaginative public the portentous meaning of that tremendous cataclysm, than all the other writings on the subject in the English language put together. His presentation of Puritanism and the Commonwealth and Oliver Cromwell first made the most elevating period of the national history in any way really intelligible. The Life of Frederick the Second, whatever judgment we may pass upon its morality, or even upon its place as a work of historic art, is a model of laborious and exhaustive narration of facts not before accessible to the reader of history. For all this, and for much other work eminently useful and meritorious even from the mechanical point of view, Mr. Carlyle deserves the warmest recognition. His genius gave him a right to mock at the ineffectiveness of Dryasdust, but his genius was also

too true to prevent him from adding the always needful supplement of a painstaking industry that rivals Dryasdust's own most strenuous toil. Take out of the mind of the English reader of ordinary cultivation and the average journalist, usually a degree or two lower than this, their conceptions of the French Revolution and the English Rebellion, and their knowledge of German literature and history, as well as most of their acquaintance with the prominent men of the eighteenth century, and we shall see how much work Mr. Carlyle has done simply as schoolmaster.

This, however, is emphatically a secondary aspect of his character, and of the function which he has fulfilled in relation to the more active tendencies of modern opinion and feeling. We must go on to other ground, if we would find the field in which he has laboured most ardently and with most acceptance. History and literature have been with him, what they will always be with wise and understanding minds of creative and even of the higher critical faculty —only embodiments, illustrations, experiments, for ideas about religion, conduct, society, history, government, and all the other great heads and departments of a complete social doctrine. From this point of view, the time has perhaps come when we may fairly attempt to discern some of the tendencies which Mr. Carlyle has initiated or accelerated and deepened, though assuredly many years must elapse before any adequate measure can be taken of their force and final direction.

It would be a comparatively simple process to affix the regulation labels of philosophy; to say that Mr. Carlyle is a Pantheist in religion (or a Pot-theist, to use the alternative whose flippancy gave such offence to Sterling on one occasion[1]), a Transcendentalist or Intuitionist in ethics, an Absolutist in politics, and so forth, with the addition of a crowd of privative or negative epithets at discretion. But classifications of this sort are the worst enemies of true knowledge. Such names are by the vast majority even of persons who think themselves educated, imperfectly apprehended, ignorantly interpreted, and crudely and recklessly applied. It is not too much to say that nine out of ten people who think they have delivered themselves of a criticism when they call Mr. Carlyle a Pantheist, could neither explain with any precision what Pantheism is, nor have ever thought of determining the parts of his writings where this particular monster is believed to lurk. Labels are devices for saving talkative persons the trouble of thinking. As I once wrote elsewhere:

"The readiness to use general names in speaking of the greater subjects, and the fitness which qualifies a man to use them, commonly exist in inverse proportions. If we reflect on the conditions out of which ordinary opinion is generated, we may well be startled at the profuse liberality with which names of the widest and most complex and variable significance are bestowed on all hands. The majority of

[1] *Life of John Sterling*, p. 153.

the ideas which constitute most men's intellectual stock-in-trade have accrued by processes quite distinct from fair reasoning and consequent conviction. This is so notorious, that it is amazing how so many people can go on freely and rapidly labelling thinkers or writers with names which they themselves are not competent to bestow, and which their hearers are not competent either to understand generally, or to test in the specific instance.'

These labels are rather more worthless than usual in the present case, because Mr. Carlyle is ostentatiously illogical and defiantly inconsistent; and, therefore, the term which might correctly describe one side of his teaching or belief would be tolerably sure to give a wholly false impression of some of its other sides. The qualifications necessary to make any one of the regular epithets fairly applicable would have to be so many, that the glosses would virtually overlay the text. We shall be more likely to reach an instructive appreciation by discarding such substitutes for examination, and considering, not what pantheistic, absolutist, transcendental, or any other doctrine means, or what it is worth, but what it is that Mr. Carlyle means about men, their character, their relations to one another, and what that is worth.

With most men and women the master element in their opinions is obviously neither their own reason nor their own imagination, independently exercised, but only mere use and wont, chequered by fortuitous

sensations, and modified in the better cases by the influence of a favourite teacher; while in the worse the teacher is the favourite who happens to chime in most harmoniously with prepossessions, or most effectually to nurse and exaggerate them. Among the superior minds the balance between reason and imagination is scarcely ever held exactly true, nor is either firmly kept within the precise bounds that are proper to it. It is a question of temperament which of the two mental attitudes becomes fixed and habitual, as it is a question of temperament how violently either of them straitens and distorts the normal faculties of vision. The man who prides himself on a hard head, which would usually be better described as a thin head, may and constantly does fall into a confirmed manner of judging character and circumstance, so narrow, one-sided, and elaborately superficial, as to make common sense shudder at the crimes that are committed in the divine name of reason. Excess on the other side leads people into emotional transports, in which the pre-eminent respect that is due to truth, the difficulty of discovering the truth, the narrowness of the way that leads thereto, the merits of intellectual precision and definiteness, and even the merits of moral precision and definiteness, are all effectually veiled by purple or fiery clouds of anger, sympathy, and sentimentalism, which imagination has hung over the intelligence.

The familiar distinction between the poetic and the scientific temper is another way of stating the same

difference. The one fuses or crystallises external objects and circumstances in the medium of human feeling and passion; the other is concerned with the relations of objects and circumstances among themselves, including in them all the facts of human consciousness, and with the discovery and classification of these relations. There is, too, a corresponding distinction between the aspects which conduct, character, social movement, and the objects of nature are able to present, according as we scrutinise them with a view to exactitude of knowledge, or are stirred by some appeal which they make to our various faculties and forms of sensibility, our tenderness, sympathy, awe, terror, love of beauty, and all the other emotions in this momentous catalogue. The starry heavens have one side for the astronomer, as astronomer, and another for the poet, as poet. The nightingale, the skylark, the cuckoo, move one sort of interest in an ornithologist, and a very different sort in a Shelley or a Wordsworth. The hoary and stupendous formations of the inorganic world, the thousand tribes of insects, the great universe of plants, from those whose size and form and hue make us afraid as if they were deadly monsters, down to 'the meanest flower that blows,' all these are clothed with one set of attributes by scientific intelligence, and with another by sentiment, fancy, and imaginative association.

The contentiousness of rival schools of philosophy has obscured the application of the same distinction to the various orders of fact more nearly and immedi-

ately relating to man and the social union. One school has maintained the virtually unmeaning doctrine that the will is free, and therefore its followers never gave any quarter to the idea that man was as proper an object of scientific scrutiny morally and historically, as they could not deny him to be anatomically and physiologically. Their enemies have been more concerned to dislodge them from this position, than to fortify, organise, and cultivate their own. The consequences have not been without their danger. Poetic persons have rushed in where scientific persons ought not to have feared to tread. That human character and the order of events have their poetic aspect, and that their poetic treatment demands the rarest and most valuable qualities of mind, is a truth which none but narrow and superficial men of the world are rash enough to deny. But that there is a scientific aspect of these things, an order among them that can only be understood and criticised and effectually modified scientifically, by using all the caution and precision and infinite patience of the truly scientific spirit, is a truth that is constantly ignored even by men and women of the loftiest and most humane nature. In such cases misdirected and uncontrolled sensibility ends in mournful waste of their own energy, in the certain disappointment of their own aims, and where such sensibility is backed by genius, eloquence, and a peculiar set of public conditions, in prolonged and fatal disturbance of society.

Rousseau was the great type of this triumphant and

dangerous sophistry of the emotions. The Rousseau of these times for English-speaking nations is Thomas Carlyle. An apology is perhaps needed for mentioning a man of such simple, veracious, disinterested, and wholly high-minded life, in the same breath with one of the least sane men that ever lived. Community of method, like misery, makes men acquainted with strange bed-fellows. Two men of very different degrees of moral worth may notoriously both preach the same faith and both pursue the same method, and the method of Rousseau is the method of Mr. Carlyle. With each of them thought is an aspiration, and justice a sentiment, and society a retrogression. Each bids us look within our own bosoms for truth and right, postpones reason to feeling, and refers to introspection and a factitious something styled Nature, questions only to be truly solved by external observation and history. In connection with each of them has been exemplified the cruelty inherent in sentimentalism, when circumstances draw away the mask. Not the least conspicuous of the disciples of Rousseau was Robespierre. His works lay on the table of the Committee of Public Safety. The theory of the Reign of Terror was invented, and mercilessly reduced to practice, by men whom the visions of Rousseau had fired, and who were not afraid nor ashamed to wade through oceans of blood to the promised land of humanity and fine feeling. We in our days have seen the same result of sentimental doctrine in the barbarous love of the battle-field, the retrograde

passion for methods of repression, the contempt for human life, the impatience of orderly and peaceful solution. We begin with introspection and the eternities, and end in blood and iron. Again, Rousseau's first piece was an anathema upon the science and art of his time, and a denunciation of books and speech. Mr. Carlyle, in exactly the same spirit, has denounced logic mills, warned us all away from literature, and habitually subordinated discipline of the intelligence to the passionate assertion of the will. There are passages in which he speaks respectfully of Intellect, but he is always careful to show that he is using the term in a special sense of his own, and confounding it with 'the exact summary of human *Worth*,' as in one place he defines it. Thus, instead of co-ordinating moral worthiness with intellectual energy, virtue with intelligence, right action of the will with scientific processes of the understanding, he has either placed one immeasurably below the other, or else has mischievously insisted on treating them as identical. The dictates of a kind heart are of superior force to the maxims of political economy; swift and peremptory resolution is a safer guide than a balancing judgment. If the will works easily and surely, we may assume the rectitude of the moving impulse. All this is no caricature of a system which sets sentiment, sometimes hard sentiment and sometimes soft sentiment, above reason and method.

In other words, the writer who in these days has done more than anybody else to fire men's hearts

with a feeling for right and an eager desire for social activity, has with deliberate contempt thrust away from him the only instruments by which we can make sure what right is, and that our social action is wise and effective. A born poet, only wanting perhaps a clearer feeling for form and a more delicate spiritual self-possession, to have added another name to the illustrious catalogue of English singers, he has been driven by the impetuosity of his sympathies to attack the scientific side of social questions in an imaginative and highly emotional manner. Depth of benevolent feeling is unhappily no proof of fitness for handling complex problems, and a fine sense of the picturesque is no more a qualification for dealing effectively with the difficulties of an old society, than the composition of Wordsworth's famous sonnet on Westminster Bridge was any reason for supposing that the author would have made a competent Commissioner of Works.

Why should society, with its long and deep-hidden processes of growth, its innumerable intricacies and far-off historic complexities, be as an open book to any reader of its pages who brings acuteness and passion, but no patience nor calm accuracy of meditation? Objects of thought and observation far simpler, more free from all blinding and distorting elements, more accessible to direct and ocular inspection, are by rational consent reserved for the calmest and most austere moods and methods of human intelligence. Nor is denunciation of the

conditions of a problem the quickest step towards solving it. Vituperation of the fact that supply and demand practically regulate certain kinds of bargain, is no contribution to systematic efforts to discover some more moral regulator. Take all the invective that Mr. Carlyle has poured out against political economy, the Dismal Science, and Gospel according to M'Croudy. Granting the absolute and entire inadequateness of political economy to sum up the laws and conditions of a healthy social state—and no one more than the present writer deplores the mischief which the application of the maxims of political economy by ignorant and selfish spirits has effected in confirming the worst tendencies of the commercial character—yet is it not a first condition of our being able to substitute better machinery for the ordinary rules of self-interest, that we know scientifically how those rules do and must operate? Again, in another field, it is well to cry out: 'Caitiff, we hate thee,' with a 'hatred, a hostility inexorable, unappeasable, which blasts the scoundrel, and all scoundrels ultimately, into black annihilation and disappearance from the scene of things.'[1] But this is slightly vague. It is not scientific. There are caitiffs and caitiffs. There is a more and a less of scoundrelism, as there is a more and a less of black annihilation, and we must have systematic jurisprudence, with its classification of caitiffs and its graduated blasting. Has Mr. Carlyle's passion, or

[1] *Latter-Day Pamphlets.* II. Model Prisons, p. 92.

have the sedulous and scientific labours of that Bentham, whose name with him is a symbol of evil, done most in what he calls the Scoundrel-province of Reform within the last half-century? Sterling's criticism on Teufelsdröckh told a hard but wholesome truth to Teufelsdröckh's creator. 'Wanting peace himself,' said Sterling, 'his fierce dissatisfaction fixes on all that is weak, corrupt, and imperfect around him; and instead of a calm and steady co-operation with all those who are endeavouring to apply the highest ideas as remedies for the worst evils, he holds himself in savage isolation.'[1]

Mr. Carlyle assures us of Bonaparte that he had an instinct of nature better than his culture was, and illustrates it by the story that during the Egyptian expedition, when his scientific men were busy arguing that there could be no God, Bonaparte, looking up to the stars, confuted them decisively by saying: 'Very ingenious, Messieurs; but *who made* all that?' Surely the most inconclusive answer since coxcombs vanquished Berkeley with a grin. It is, however, a type of Mr. Carlyle's faith in the instinct of nature, as superseding the necessity for patient logical method; a faith, in other words, in crude and uninterpreted sense. Insight, indeed, goes far, but it no more entitles its possessor to dispense with reasoned discipline and system in treating scientific subjects, than it relieves him from the necessity of conforming to the physical conditions of health. Why should

[1] Letter to Mr. Carlyle, in the *Life*, Pt. ii. ch. ii.

society be the one field of thought in which a man of genius is at liberty to assume all his major premisses, and swear all his conclusions?

The deep unrest of unsatisfied souls meets its earliest solace in the effective and sympathetic expression of the same unrest from the lips of another. To look it in the face is the first approach to a sedative. To find our discontent with the actual, our yearning for an undefined ideal, our aspiration after impossible heights of being, shared and amplified in the emotional speech of a man of genius, is the beginning of consolation. Some of the most generous spirits a hundred years ago found this in the eloquence of Rousseau, and some of the most generous spirits of this time and place have found it in the writer of the *Sartor*. In ages not of faith, there will always be multitudinous troops of people crying for the moon. If such sorrowful pastime be ever permissible to men, it has been natural and lawful this long while in præ-revolutionary England, as it was natural and lawful a century since in præ-revolutionary France. A man born into a community where political forms, from the monarchy down to the popular chamber, are mainly hollow shams disguising the coarse supremacy of wealth, where religion is mainly official and political, and is ever too ready to dissever itself alike from the spirit of justice, the spirit of charity, and the spirit of truth, and where literature does not as a rule permit itself to discuss serious subjects frankly

and worthily[1]—a community, in short, where the great aim of all classes and orders with power is by dint of rigorous silence, fast shutting of the eyes, and stern stopping of the ears, somehow to keep the social pyramid on its apex, with the fatal result of preserving for England its glorious fame as a paradise for the well-to-do, a purgatory for the able, and a hell for the poor—why, a man born into all this with a heart something softer than a flint, and with intellectual vision something more acute than that of a Troglodyte, may well be allowed to turn aside and cry for moons for a season.

Impotent unrest, however, is followed in Mr. Carlyle by what is socially an impotent solution, just as it was with Rousseau. To bid a man do his duty in one page, and then in the next to warn him sternly away from utilitarianism, from political economy, from all 'theories of the moral sense,' and from any other definite means of ascertaining what duty may chance to be, is but a bald and naked counsel. Spiritual nullity and material confusion in a society are not to be repaired by a transformation of egotism, querulous, brooding, marvelling, into egotism, active, practical, objective, not uncomplacent. The moral movements to which the instinctive impulses of humanity fallen on evil times uniformly give birth, early Christianity, for instance, or the socialism of Rousseau, may destroy a society, but they cannot save it unless in conjunction with organising policy. A thorough

[1] Written in 1870.

appreciation of fiscal and economic truths was at least as indispensable for the life of the Roman Empire as the acceptance of a Messiah; and it was only in the hands of a great statesman like Gregory VII. that Christianity became at last an instrument powerful enough to save civilisation. What the moral renovation of Rousseau did for France we all know. Now Rousseau's was far more profoundly social than the doctrine of Mr. Carlyle, which, while in name a renunciation of self, has all its foundations in the purest individualism. Rousseau, notwithstanding the method of *Emile*, treats man as a part of a collective whole, contracting manifold relations and owing manifold duties; and he always appeals to the love and sympathy which an imaginary God of nature has implanted in the heart. His aim is unity. Mr. Carlyle, following the same method of obedience to his own personal emotions, unfortified by patient reasoning, lands at the other extremity, and lays all his stress on the separatist instincts. The individual stands alone confronted by the eternities; between these and his own soul exists the one central relation. This has all the fundamental egotism of the doctrine of personal salvation, emancipated from fable, and varnished with an emotional phrase. The doctrine has been very widely interpreted, and without any forcing, as a religious expression for the conditions of commercial success.

If we look among our own countrymen, we find that the apostle of self-renunciation is nowhere so

beloved as by the best of those whom steady self-reliance and thrifty self-securing and a firm eye to the main chance have got successfully on in the world. A Carlylean anthology, or volume of the master's sentences, might easily be composed, that should contain the highest form of private liturgy accepted by the best of the industrial classes, masters or men. They forgive or overlook the writer's denunciations of Beaver Industrialisms, which they attribute to his caprice or spleen. This is the worst of an emotional teacher, that people take only so much as they please from him, while with a reasoner they must either refute by reason, or else they must accept by reason, and not at simple choice. When trade is brisk, and England is successfully competing in the foreign markets, the books that enjoin silence and self-annihilation have a wonderful popularity in the manufacturing districts. This circumstance is honourable both to them and to him, as far as it goes, but it furnishes some reason for suspecting that our most vigorous moral reformer, so far from propelling us in new grooves, has in truth only given new firmness and coherency to tendencies that were strongly marked enough in the national character before. He has increased the fervour of the country, but without materially changing its objects; there is all the less disguise among us as a result of his teaching, but no radical modification of the sentiments which people are sincere in. The most stirring general appeal to the emotions, to be effective for

more than negative purposes, must lead up to definite maxims and specific precepts. As a negative renovation Mr. Carlyle's doctrine was perfect. It effectually put an end to the mood of Byronism. May we say that with the neutralisation of Byron, his most decisive and special work came to an end? May we not say further, that the true renovation of England, if such a process be ever feasible, will lie in a quite other method than this of emotion? It will lie not in more moral earnestness only, but in a more open intelligence; not merely in a more dogged resolution to work and be silent, but in a ready willingness to use the understanding. The poison of our sins, says Mr. Carlyle in his latest utterance, 'is not intellectual dimness chiefly, but torpid unveracity of heart.' Yes, but all unveracity, torpid or fervid, breeds intellectual dimness, and it is this last which prevents us from seeing a way out of the present ignoble situation. We need light more than heat; intellectual alertness, faith in the reasoning faculty, accessibility to new ideas. To refuse to use the intellect patiently and with system, to decline to seek scientific truth, to prefer effusive indulgence of emotion to the laborious and disciplined and candid exploration of new ideas, is not this, too, a torpid unveracity? And has not Mr. Carlyle, by the impatience of his method, done somewhat to deepen it?

It is very well to invite us to moral reform, to bring ourselves to be of heroic mind, as the surest way to 'the blessed Aristocracy of the Wisest.' But how shall we know the wisest when we see them, and

how shall a nation know, if not by keen respect and watchfulness for intellectual truth and the teachers of it? Much as we may admire Mr. Carlyle's many gifts, and highly as we may revere his character, it is yet very doubtful whether anybody has as yet learnt from him the precious lesson of scrupulosity and conscientiousness in actively and constantly using the intelligence. This would have been the solid foundation of the true hero-worship.

Let thus much have been said on the head of temperament. The historic position also of every writer is an indispensable key to many things in his teaching.[1] We have to remember in Mr. Carlyle's case, that he was born in the memorable year when the French Revolution, in its narrower sense, was closed by the Whiff of Grape-shot, and when the great century of emancipation and illumination was ending darkly in battles and confusion. During his youth the reaction was in full flow, and the lamp had been handed to runners who not only reversed the ideas and methods, but even turned aside from the goal of their precursors. Hopefulness and enthusiastic confidence in humanity when freed from the fetters of spiritual superstition and secular tyranny, marked all the most characteristic and influential speculations

[1] The dates of Mr. Carlyle's principal compositions are these:—*Life of Schiller*, 1825; *Sartor Resartus*, 1831; *French Revolution*, 1837; *Chartism*, 1839; *Hero-Worship*, 1840; *Past and Present*, 1843; *Cromwell*, 1845; *Latter-Day Pamphlets*, 1850; *Friedrich the Second*, 1858-1865; *Shooting Niagara*, 1867.

of the two generations before '89. The appalling failure which attended the splendid attempt to realise these hopes in a renewed and perfected social structure, had no more than its natural effect in turning men's minds back, not to the past of Rousseau's imagination, but to the past of recorded history. The single epoch in the annals of Europe since the rise of Christianity, for which no good word could be found, was the epoch of Voltaire. The hideousness of the Christian church in the ninth and tenth centuries was passed lightly over by men who had only eyes for the moral obliquity of the church of the Encyclopædia. The brilliant but profoundly inadequate essays on Voltaire and Diderot were the outcome in Mr. Carlyle of the same reactionary spirit. Nobody now, we may suppose, who is competent to judge, thinks that that estimate of 'the net product of the tumultuous Atheism' of Diderot and his fellow-workers, is a satisfactory account of the influence and significance of the Encyclopædia; nor that to sum up Voltaire, with his burning passion for justice, his indefatigable humanity, his splendid energy in intellectual production, his righteous hatred of superstition, as merely a supreme master of *persiflage*, can be a process partaking of finality. The fact that to the eighteenth century belong the subjects of more than half of these thirty volumes, is a proof of the fascination of the period for an author who has never ceased to vilipend it. The saying is perhaps as true in these matters as of private relations, that hatred is not so

far removed from love as indifference is. Be that as it may, the Carlylean view of the eighteenth century as a time of mere scepticism and unbelief, is now clearly untenable to men who remember the fervour of Jean Jacques, and the more rational, but not any less fervid faith of the disciples of Perfectibility. But this was not so clear fifty years since, when the crash and dust of demolition had not so subsided as to let men see how much had risen up behind. The fire of the new school had been taken from the very conflagration which they execrated, but they were not held back from denouncing the eighteenth century by the reflection that, at any rate, its thought and action had made ready the way for much of what is best in the nineteenth.

Mr. Carlyle himself has told us about Coleridge, and the movement of which Coleridge was the leader. That movement has led men in widely different ways. In one direction it has stagnated in the sunless swamps of a theosophy, from which a cloud of sedulous ephemera still suck a little spiritual moisture. In another it led to the sacramental and sacerdotal developments of Anglicanism. In a third, among men with strong practical energy, to the benevolent bluster of a sort of Christianity which is called muscular because it is not intellectual. It would be an error to suppose that these and the other streams that have sprung from the same source, did not in the days of their fulness fertilise and gladden many lands. The wordy pietism of one school, the mimetic rites of

another, the romping heroics of the third, are degenerate forms. How long they are likely to endure, it would be rash to predict among a nation whose established teachers and official preachers are prevented by an inveterate timidity from trusting themselves to that disciplined intelligence, in which the superior minds of the last century had such courageous faith.

Mr. Carlyle drank in some sort at the same fountain. Coleridgean ideas were in the air. It was there probably that he acquired that sympathy with the past, or with certain portions of the past, that feeling of the unity of history, and that conviction of the necessity of binding our theory of history fast with our theory of other things, in all of which he so strikingly resembles the great Anglican leaders of a generation ago, and in gaining some of which so strenuous an effort must have been needed to modify the prepossessions of a Scotch Puritan education. No one has contributed more powerfully to that movement which, drawing force from many and various sides, has brought out the difference between the historian and the gazetteer or antiquary. One half of *Past and Present* might have been written by one of the Oxford chiefs in the days of the Tracts. Vehement native force was too strong for such a man to remain in the luminous haze which made the Coleridgean atmosphere. A well-known chapter in the *Life of Sterling*, which some, indeed, have found too ungracious, shows how little hold he felt Coleridge's

ideas to be capable of retaining, and how little permanent satisfaction resided in them. Coleridge, in fact, was not only a poet but a thinker as well; he had science of a sort as well as imagination, but it was not science for headlong and impatient souls. Mr. Carlyle has probably never been able to endure a subdivision all his life, and the infinite ramifications of the central division between object and subject might well be with him an unprofitable weariness to the flesh.

In England, the greatest literary organ of the Revolution was unquestionably Byron, whose genius, daring, and melodramatic lawlessness, exercised what now seems such an amazing fascination over the least revolutionary of European nations. Unfitted for scientific work and full of ardour, Mr. Carlyle found his mission in rushing with all his might to the annihilation of this terrible poet, who, like some gorgon, hydra, or chimera dire planted at the gate, carried off a yearly tale of youths and virgins from the city. In literature, only a revolutionist can thoroughly overpower a revolutionist. Mr. Carlyle had fully as much daring as Byron; his writing at its best, if without the many-eyed minuteness and sustained pulsing force of Byron, has still the full swell and tide and energy of genius: he is as lawless in his disrespect for some things established. He had the unspeakable advantage of being that which, though not in this sense, only his own favourite word of contempt describes, respectable; and, for another thing,

of being ruggedly sincere. Carlylism is the male of Byronism. It is Byronism with thew and sinew, bass pipe and shaggy bosom. There is the same grievous complaint against the time and its men and its spirit, something even of the same contemptuous despair, the same sense of the puniness of man in the centre of a cruel and frowning universe; but there is in Carlylism a deliverance from it all, indeed the only deliverance possible. Its despair is a despair without misery. Labour in a high spirit, duty done, and right service performed in fortitudinous temper—here was, not indeed a way out, but a way of erect living within.

Against Byronism the ordinary moralist and preacher could really do nothing, because Byronism was an appeal that lay in the regions of the mind only accessible by one with an eye and a large poetic feeling for the infinite whole of things. It was not the rebellion only in *Manfred*, nor the wit in *Don Juan*, nor the graceful melancholy of *Childe Harold*, which made their author an idol, and still make him one to multitudes of Frenchmen and Germans and Italians. One prime secret of it is the air and spaciousness, the freedom and elemental grandeur of Byron. Who has not felt this to be one of the glories of Mr. Carlyle's work, that it, too, is large and spacious, rich with the fulness of a sense of things unknown and wonderful, and ever in the tiniest part showing us the stupendous and overwhelming whole? The magnitude of the universal forces enlarges the pettiness of man, and the smallness of his achievement and endurance takes a complexion

of greatness from the vague immensity that surrounds and impalpably mixes with it.

Remember further, that while in Byron the outcome of this was rebellion, in Carlyle its outcome is reverence, a noble mood, which is one of the highest predispositions of the English character. The instincts of sanctification rooted in Teutonic races, and which in the corrupt and unctuous forms of a mechanical religious profession are so revolting, were mocked and outraged, where they were not superciliously ignored, in every line of the one, while in the other they were enthroned under the name of Worship, as the very key and centre of the right life. The prophet who never wearies of declaring that 'only in bowing down before the Higher does man feel himself exalted,' touched solemn organ notes, that awoke a response from dim religious depths, never reached by the stormy wailings of the Byronic lyre. The political side of the reverential sentiment is equally conciliated, and the prime business of individuals and communities pronounced to be the search after worthy objects of this divine quality of reverence. While kings' cloaks and church tippets are never spared, still less suffered to protect the dishonour of ignoble wearers of them, the inadequateness of aggression and demolition, the necessity of quiet order, the uncounted debt that we owe to rulers and to all sorts of holy and great men who have given this order to the world, all this brought repose and harmony into spirits that the hollow thunders of universal rebellion against tyrants and priests had

worn into thinness and confusion. Again, at the bottom of the veriest *frondeur* with English blood in his veins, in his most defiant moment there lies a conviction that after all something known as common sense is the measure of life, and that to work hard is a demonstrated precept of common sense. Carlylism exactly hits this and brings it forward. We cannot wonder that Byronism was routed from the field.

It may have been in the transcendently firm and clear-eyed intelligence of Goethe that Mr. Carlyle first found a responsive encouragement to the profoundly positive impulses of his own spirit.[1] There is, indeed, a whole heaven betwixt the serenity, balance, and bright composure of the one, and the vehemence, passion, masterful wrath, of the other; and the vast, incessant, exact inquisitiveness of Goethe finds nothing corresponding to it in Mr. Carlyle's multitudinous contempt and indifference, sometimes express and sometimes only very significantly implied, for forms of intellectual activity that do not happen to be personally congenial. But each is a god, though the one sits ever on Olympus, while the other is as one from Tartarus. There is in each, besides all else, a

1 *Positive.* No English lexicon as yet seems to justify the use of this word in one of the senses of the French *positif*, as when a historian, for instance, speaks of the *esprit positif* of Bonaparte. We have no word, I believe, that exactly corresponds, so perhaps *positive* with that significance will become acclimatised. A distinct and separate idea of this particular characteristic is indispensable.

certain remarkable directness of glance, an intrepid and penetrating quality of vision, which defies analysis. Occasional turgidity of phrase and unidiomatic handling of language do not conceal the simplicity of the process by which Mr. Carlyle pierces through obstruction down to the abstrusest depths. And the important fact is that this abstruseness is not verbal, any more than it is the abstruseness of fog and cloud. His epithet, or image, or trope, shoots like a sunbeam on to the matter, throwing a transfigurating light, even where it fails to pierce to its central core.

Eager for a firm foothold, yet wholly revolted by the too narrow and unelevated positivity of the eighteenth century; eager also for some recognition of the wide realm of the unknowable, yet wholly unsatisfied by the transcendentalism of the English and Scotch philosophic reactions; he found in Goethe that truly free and adequate positivity which accepts all things as parts of a natural or historic order, and while insisting on the recognition of the actual conditions of this order as indispensable, and condemning attempted evasions of such recognition as futile and childish, yet opens an ample bosom for all forms of beauty in art, and for all nobleness in moral aspiration. That Mr. Carlyle has reached this high ground we do not say. Temperament has kept him down from it. But it is after this that he has striven. The tumid nothingness of pure transcendentalism he has always abhorred. Some of Mr. Carlyle's favourite phrases have disguised from his readers the intensely practical

turn of his whole mind. His constant presentation of the Eternities, the Immensities, and the like, has veiled his almost narrow adherence to plain record without moral comment, and his often cynical respect for the dangerous, yet, when rightly qualified and guided, the solid formula that What is, is. The Eternities and Immensities are only a kind of awful background. The highest souls are held to be deeply conscious of these vast unspeakable presences, yet even with them they are only inspiring accessories; the true interest lies in the practical attitude of such men towards the actual and palpable circumstances that surround them. This spirituality, whose place in Mr. Carlyle's teaching has been so extremely misstated, sinks wholly out of sight in connection with such heroes as the coarse and materialist Bonaparte, of whom, however, the hero-worshipper in earlier pieces speaks with some laudable misgiving, and the not less coarse and materialist Frederick, about whom no misgiving is permitted to the loyal disciple. The admiration for military methods, on condition that they are successful, for Mr. Carlyle, like Providence, is always on the side of big and victorious battalions, is the last outcome of a devotion to vigorous action and practical effect, which no verbal garniture of a transcendental kind can hinder us from perceiving to be more purely materialist and unfeignedly brutal than anything which sprung from the reviled thought of the eighteenth century.

It is instructive to remark that another of the most

illustrious enemies of that century and all its works, Joseph de Maistre, had the same admiration for the effectiveness of war, and the same extreme interest and concern in the men and things of war. He, too, declares that 'the loftiest and most generous sentiments are probably to be found in the soldier;' and that war, if terrible, is divine and splendid and fascinating, the manifestation of a sublime law of the universe. We must, however, do De Maistre the justice to point out, first, that he gave a measure of his strange interest in Surgery and Judgment, as Mr. Carlyle calls it, to the public executioner, a division of the honours of social surgery which is no more than fair; while, in the second place, he redeems the brutality of the military surgical idea after a fashion, by an extraordinary mysticism, which led him to see in war a divine, inscrutable force, determining success in a manner absolutely defying all the speculations of human reason.[1] The biographer of Frederick apparently finds no inscrutable force at all, but only will, tenacity, and powder kept dry. There is a vast difference between this and the absolutism of the mystic.

'Nature,' he says in one place, 'keeps silently a most exact Savings-bank, and official register correct to the most evanescent item, Debtor and Creditor, in respect to one and all of us; silently marks down, Creditor by such and such an unseen act of veracity and heroism; Debtor to such a loud blustery blunder,

[1] *Soirées de Saint Pétersbourg, 7ième entretien.*

twenty-seven million strong or one unit strong, and to all acts and words and thoughts executed in consequence of that—Debtor, Debtor, Debtor, day after day, rigorously as Fate (for this *is* Fate that is writing); and at the end of the account you will have it all to pay, my friend.'[1]

That is to say, there is a law of recompense for communities of men, and as nations sow, even thus they reap. But what is Mr. Carlyle's account of the precise nature and operation of this law? What is the original distinction between an act of veracity and a blunder? Why was the blow struck by the Directory on the Eighteenth Fructidor a blunder, and that struck by Bonaparte on the Eighteenth Brumaire a veracity? What principle of registration is that which makes Nature debtor to Frederick the Second for the seizure of Silesia, and Bonaparte debtor to Nature for 'trampling on the world, holding it tyrannously down?' It is very well to tell us that 'Injustice pays itself with frightful compound interest,' but there are reasons for suspecting that Mr. Carlyle's definition of the just and the unjust are such as to reduce this and all his other sentences of like purport to the level of mere truism and repetition. If you secretly or openly hold that to be just and veracious which is successful, then it needs no further demonstration that penalties of ultimate failure are exacted for injustice, because it is precisely the failure that constitutes the injustice.

[1] *Latter-Day Pamphlets*, No. V. p. 247.

This is the kernel of all that is most retrograde in Mr. Carlyle's teaching. He identifies the physical with the moral order, confounds faithful conformity to the material conditions of success, with loyal adherence to virtuous rule and principle, and then appeals to material triumph as the sanction of nature and the ratification of high heaven. Admiring with profoundest admiration the spectacle of an inflexible will, when armed with a long-headed insight into means and quantities and forces as its instrument, and yet deeply revering the abstract ideal of justice; dazzled by the methods and the products of iron resolution, yet imbued with traditional affection for virtue; he has seen no better way of conciliating both inclinations than by insisting that they point in the same direction, and that virtue and success, justice and victory, merit and triumph, are in the long run all one and the same thing. The most fatal of confusions. Compliance with material law and condition ensures material victory, and compliance with moral condition ensures moral triumph; but then moral triumph is as often as not physical martyrdom. Superior military virtues must unquestionably win the verdict of Fate, Nature, Fact, and Veracity, on the battle-field, but what then? Has Fate no other verdicts to record than these? and at the moment while she writes Nature down debtor to the conqueror, may she not also have written her down his implacable creditor for the moral cost of his conquest?

The anarchy and confusion of Poland were an out-

rage upon political conditions, which brought her to dependence and ruin. The manner of the partition was an outrage on moral conditions, for which each of the nations that profited by it paid in the lawlessness of Bonaparte. The preliminaries of Léoben, again, and Campo-Formio were the key to Waterloo and St. Helena. But Mr. Carlyle stops short at the triumph of compliance with the conditions of material victory. He is content to know that Frederick made himself master of Silesia, without considering that the day of Jena loomed in front. It suffices to say that the whiff of grape-shot on the Thirteenth Vendémiaire brought Sans-culottism to order and an end, without measuring what permanent elements of disorder were ineradicably implanted by resort to the military arm. Only the failures are used to point the great historical moral, and if Bonaparte had died in the Tuileries in all honour and glory, he would have ranked with Frederick or Francia as a wholly true man. Mr. Carlyle would then no more have declared the execution of Palm 'a palpable, tyrannous, murderous injustice,' than he declares it of the execution of Katte or Schlubhut. The fall of the traitor to fact, of the French monarchy, of the windbags of the first Republic, of Charles I., is improved for our edification, but then the other lesson, the failure of heroes like Cromwell, remains isolated and incoherent, with no place in a morally regulated universe. If the strength of Prussia now proves that Frederick had a right to seize Silesia, and relieves us from inquiring further

whether he had any such right or not, why then should not the royalist assume, from the fact of the restoration, and the consequent obliteration of Cromwell's work, that the Protector was a usurper and a phantasm captain?

Apart from its irreconcilableness with many of his most emphatic judgments, Mr. Carlyle's doctrine about Nature's registration of the penalties of injustice is intrinsically an anachronism. It is worse than the Catholic reaction, because while De Maistre only wanted Europe to return to the system of the twelfth century, Mr. Carlyle's theory of history takes us back to times prehistoric, when might and right were the same thing. It is decidedly natural that man in a state of nature should take and keep as much as his skill and physical strength enable him to do. But society and its benefits are all so much ground won from nature and her state. The more natural a method of acquisition, the less likely is it to be social. The essence of morality is the subjugation of nature in obedience to social needs. To use Kant's admirable description, concert *pathologically* extorted by the mere necessities of situation, is exalted into a *moral* union. It is exactly in this progressive substitution of one for the other that advancement consists, that Progress of the Species at which, in certain of its forms, Mr. Carlyle has so many gibes.

That, surely, is the true test of veracity and heroism in conduct. Does your hero's achievement go in the pathological or the moral direction? Does

it tend to spread faith in that cunning, violence, force, which were once primitive and natural conditions of life, and which will still by natural law work to their own proper triumphs in so far as these conditions survive, and within such limits, and in such sense, as they permit; or, on the contrary, does it tend to heighten respect for civic law, for pledged word, for the habit of self-surrender to the public good, and for all those other ideas and sentiments and usages which have been painfully gained from the sterile sands of egotism and selfishness, and to which we are indebted for all the untold boons conferred by the social union on man?

Viewed from this point, the manner of the achievement is as important as is its immediate product, a consideration which it is one of Mr. Carlyle's most marked peculiarities to take into small account. Detesting Jesuitism from the bottom of his soul, he has been too willing to accept its fundamental maxim, that the end justifies the means. He has taken the end for the ratification or proscription of the means, and stamped it as the verdict of Fate and Fact on the transaction and its doer. A safer position is this, that the means prepare the end, and the end is what the means have made it. Here is the limit of the true law of the relations between man and fate. Justice and injustice in the law, let us abstain from inquiring after.

There are two sets of relations which have still to be regulated in some degree by the primitive and

pathological principle of repression and main force. The first of these concern that unfortunate body of criminal and vicious persons, whose unsocial propensities are constantly straining and endangering the bonds of the social union. They exist in the midst of the most highly civilised communities, with all the predatory or violent habits of barbarous tribes. They are the active and unconquered remnant of the natural state, and it is as unscientific as the experience of some unwise philanthropy has shown it to be ineffective, to deal with them exactly as if they occupied the same moral and social level as the best of their generation. We are amply justified in employing towards them, wherever their offences endanger order, the same methods of coercion which originally made society possible. No tenable theory about free will or necessity, no theory of praise and blame that will bear positive tests, lays us under any obligation to spare either the comfort or the life of a man who indulges in certain anti-social kinds of conduct. Mr. Carlyle has done much to wear this just and austere view into the minds of his generation, and in so far he has performed an excellent service.

The second set of relations in which the pathological element still so largely predominates are those between nations. Separate and independent communities are still in a state of nature. The tie between them is only the imperfect, loose, and non-moral tie of self-interest and material power. Many publicists and sentimental politicians are ever striving

to conceal this displeasing fact from themselves and others, and evading the lesson of the outbreaks that now and again convulse the civilised world. Mr. Carlyle's history of the rise and progress of the power of the Prussian monarchy is the great illustration of the hold which he has got of the conception of the international state as a state of nature; and here again, in so far as he has helped to teach us to study the past by historic methods, he has undoubtedly done laudable work.

Yet have we not to confess that there is another side to this kind of truth, in both these fields? We may finally pronounce on a given way of thinking, only after we have discerned its goal. Not knowing this, we cannot accurately know its true tendency and direction. Now, every recognition of the pathological necessity should imply a progress and effort towards its conversion into moral relationship. The difference between a reactionary and a truly progressive thinker or group of ideas is not that the one assumes virtuousness and morality as having been the conscious condition of international dealings, while the other asserts that such dealings were the lawful consequence of self-interest and the contest of material forces; nor is it that the one insists on viewing international transactions from the same moral point which would be the right one, if independent communities actually formed one stable and settled family, while the other declines to view their morality at all. The vital difference is, that while the reactionary writer

rigorously confines his faith within the region of facts accomplished, the other anticipates a time when the endeavour of the best minds in the civilised world, co-operating with every favouring external circumstance that arises, shall have in the international circle raised moral considerations to an ever higher and higher pre-eminence, and in internal conditions shall have left in the chances and training of the individual, ever less and less excuse or grounds for a predisposition to anti-social and barbaric moods. This hopefulness, in some shape or other, is an indispensable mark of the most valuable thought. To stop at the soldier and the gibbet, and such order as they can furnish, is to close the eyes to the entire problem of the future, and we may be sure that what omits the future is no adequate nor stable solution of the present.

Mr. Carlyle's influence, however, was at its height before this idolatry of the soldier became a paramount article in his creed; and it is devoutly to be hoped that not many of those whom he first taught to seize before all things fact and reality, will follow him into this torrid air, where only forces and never principles are facts, and where nothing is reality but the violent triumph of arbitrarily imposed will. There was once a better side to it all, when the injunction to seek and cling to fact was a valuable warning not to waste energy and hope in seeking lights which it is not given to man ever to find, with a solemn assurance added that in frank and untrembling recognition of

circumstance the spirit of man may find a priceless, ever-fruitful contentment. The prolonged and thousand-times repeated glorification of Unconsciousness, Silence, Renunciation, all comes to this: We are to leave the region of things unknowable, and hold fast to the duty that lies nearest. Here is the Everlasting Yea. In action only can we have certainty.

The reticences of men are often only less full of meaning than their most pregnant speech; and Mr. Carlyle's unbroken silence upon the modern validity and truth of religious creeds says much. The fact that he should have taken no distinct side in the great debate as to revelation, salvation, inspiration, and the other theological issues that agitate and divide a community where theology is now mostly verbal, has been the subject of some comment, and has had the effect of adding one rather peculiar side to the many varieties of his influence. Many in the dogmatic stage have been content to think that as he was not avowedly against them, he might be with them, and sacred persons have been known to draw their most strenuous inspirations from the chief denouncer of phantasms and exploded formulas. Only once, when speaking of Sterling's undertaking the clerical burden, does he burst out into unmistakable description of the old Jew stars that have now gone out, and wrath against those who would persuade us that these stars are still aflame and the only ones. That this reserve has been wise in its day, and has

most usefully widened the tide and scope of the teacher's popularity, one need not dispute. There are conditions when indirect solvents are most powerful, as there are others, which these have done much to prepare, when no lover of truth will stoop to declarations other than direct. Mr. Carlyle has assailed the dogmatic temper in religion, and this is work that goes deeper than to assail dogmas.

Not even Comte himself has harder words for metaphysics than Mr. Carlyle. 'The disease of Metaphysics' is perennial. Questions of Death and Immortality, Origin of Evil, Freedom and Necessity, are ever appearing and attempting to shape something of the universe. 'And ever unsuccessfully: for what theorem of the Infinite can the Finite render complete? . . . Metaphysical Speculation as it begins in No or Nothingness, so it must needs end in nothingness; circulates and must circulate in endless vortices; creating, swallowing—itself.'[1] Again, on the other side, he sets his face just as firmly against the excessive pretensions and unwarranted certitudes of the physicist. 'The course of Nature's phases on this our little fraction of a Planet is partially known to us: but who knows what deeper courses these depend on; what infinitely larger Cycle (of causes) our little Epicycle revolves on? To the Minnow every cranny

[1] 'Characteristics,' *Misc. Ess.*, iii. pp. 356-358. Rousseau in the same way makes the Savoyard Vicar declare that '*jamais le jargon de la métaphysique n'a fait découvrir une seule vérité, et il a rempli la philosophie d'absurdités dont on a honte, sitôt qu'on les dépouille de leurs grands mots.*'—*Emile*, liv. iv.

and pebble, and quality and accident may have become familiar; but does the Minnow understand the Ocean tides and periodic Currents, the Trade-winds, and Monsoons, and Moon's Eclipses, by all which the condition of its little Creek is regulated, and may, from time to time (*un*-miraculously enough) be quite overset and reversed? Such a minnow is Man; his Creek this Planet Earth; his Ocean the immeasurable All; his Monsoons and periodic Currents the mysterious course of Providence through Æons of Æons.'[1] The inalterable relativity of human knowledge has never been more forcibly illustrated; and the two passages together fix the limits of that knowledge with a sagacity truly philosophic. Between the vagaries of mystics and the vagaries of physicists lies the narrow land of rational certainty, relative, conditional, experimental, from which we view the vast realm that stretches out unknown before us, and perhaps for ever unknowable; inspiring men with an elevated awe, and environing the interests and duties of their little lives with a strange sublimity. 'We emerge from the Inane; haste stormfully across the astonished Earth; then plunge again into the Inane. . . . But whence? O Heaven, whither? Sense knows not; Faith knows not; only that it is through Mystery to Mystery.'[2]

Natural Supernaturalism, the title of one of the cardinal chapters in Mr. Carlyle's cardinal book, is

[1] *Sartor Resartus*, bk. iii. ch. viii. p. 249.
[2] *Ib.* p. 257.

perhaps as good a name as another for this two-faced yet integral philosophy, which teaches us to behold with cheerful serenity the great gulf which is fixed round our faculty and existence on every side, while it fills us with that supreme sense of countless unseen possibilities, and of the hidden, undefined movements of shadow and light over the spirit, without which the soul of man falls into hard and desolate sterility. In youth, perhaps, it is the latter aspect of Mr. Carlyle's teaching which first touches people, because youth is the time of indefinite aspiration; and it is easier, besides, to surrender ourselves passively to these vague emotional impressions, than to apply actively and contentedly to the duty that lies nearest, and to the securing of 'that infinitesimallest product' on which the teacher is ever insisting. It is the Supernaturalism which stirs men first, until larger fulness of years and wider experience of life draw them to a wise and not inglorious acquiescence in Naturalism. This last is the mood which Mr. Carlyle never wearies of extolling and enjoining under the name of Belief; and the absence of it, the inability to enter into it, is that Unbelief which he so bitterly vituperates, or, in another phrase, that Discontent, which he charges with holding the soul in such desperate and paralysing bondage.

Indeed, what is it that Mr. Carlyle urges upon us but the search for that Mental Freedom, which under one name or another has been the goal and ideal of all highest minds that have reflected on the true

constitution of human happiness? His often enjoined Silence is the first condition of this supreme kind of liberty, for what is silence but the absence of a self-tormenting assertiveness, the freedom from excessive susceptibility under the speech of others, one's removal from the choking sandy wilderness of wasted words? Belief is the mood which emancipates us from the paralysing dubieties of distraught souls, and leaves us full possession of ourselves by furnishing an unshaken and inexpugnable base for action and thought, and subordinating passion to conviction. Labour, again, perhaps the cardinal article in the creed, is at once the price of moral independence, and the first condition of that fulness and accuracy of knowledge, without which we are not free, but the bounden slaves of prejudice, unreality, darkness, and error. Even Renunciation of self is in truth only the casting out of those disturbing and masterful qualities which oppress and hinder the free, natural play of the worthier parts of character. In renunciation we thus restore to self its own diviner mind.

Yet we are never bidden either to strive or hope for a freedom that is unbounded. Circumstance has fixed limits that no effort can transcend. Novalis complained in bitter words, as we know, of the mechanical, prosaic, utilitarian, cold-hearted character of *Wilhelm Meister*, constituting it an embodiment of 'artistic Atheism,' while English critics as loudly found fault with its author for being a mystic. Exactly the same discrepancy is possible in respect of

Mr. Carlyle's own writings. In one sense he may be called mystic and transcendental, in another baldly mechanical and even cold-hearted, just as Novalis found Goethe to be in *Meister*. The latter impression is inevitable in all who, like Goethe and like Mr. Carlyle, make a lofty acquiescence in the positive course of circumstance a prime condition at once of wise endeavour and of genuine happiness. The splendid fire and unmeasured vehemence of Mr. Carlyle's manner partially veil the depth of this acquiescence, which is really not so far removed from fatalism. The torrent of his eloquence, bright and rushing as it is, flows between rigid banks and over hard rocks. Devotion to the heroic does not prevent the assumption of a tone towards the great mass of the unheroic, which implies that they are no more than two-legged mill horses, ever treading a fixed and unalterable round. He practically denies other consolation to mortals than such as they may be able to get from the final and conclusive Kismet of the oriental. It is fate. Man is the creature of his destiny. As for our supposed claims on the heavenly powers: What right, he asks, hadst thou even to be? Fatalism of this stamp is the natural and unavoidable issue of a born positivity of spirit, uninformed by scientific meditation. It exists in its coarsest and most childish kind in adventurous freebooters of the type of Napoleon, and in a noble and not egotistic kind in Oliver Cromwell's pious interpretation of the order of events by the good will and providence of God.

Two conspicuous qualities of Carlylean doctrine flow from this fatalism, or poetised utilitarianism, or illumined positivity. One of them is a tolerably constant contempt for excessive nicety in moral distinctions, and an aversion to the monotonous attitude of praise and blame. In a country overrun and corroded to the heart, as Great Britain is, with cant and a foul mechanical hypocrisy, this temper ought to have had its uses in giving a much-needed robustness to public judgment. One might suppose, from the tone of opinion among us, not only that the difference between right and wrong marks the most important aspect of conduct, which would be true; but that it marks the only aspect of it that exists, or that is worth considering, which is most profoundly false. Nowhere has Puritanism done us more harm than in thus leading us to take all breadth, and colour, and diversity, and fine discrimination, out of our judgments of men, reducing them to thin, narrow, and superficial pronouncements upon the letter of their morality, or the precise conformity of their opinions to accepted standards of truth, religious or other. Among other evils which it has inflicted, this inability to conceive of conduct except as either right or wrong, and, correspondingly in the intellectual order, of teaching except as either true or false, is at the bottom of that fatal spirit of *parti-pris* which has led to the rooting of so much injustice, disorder, immobility, and darkness in English intelligence. No excess of morality, we may be sure, has followed this

excessive adoption of the exclusively moral standard. '*Quand il n'y a plus de principes dans le cœur*,' says De Senancourt, '*on est bien scrupuleux sur les apparences publiques et sur les devoirs d'opinion.*' We have simply got for our pains a most unlovely leanness of judgment, and ever since the days when this temper set in until now, when a wholesome rebellion is afoot, it has steadily and powerfully tended to straiten character, to make action mechanical, and to impoverish art. As if there were nothing admirable in a man save unbroken obedience to the letter of the moral law, and that letter read in our own casual and local interpretation; and as if we had no faculties of sympathy, no sense for the beauty of character, no feeling for broad force and full-pulsing vitality.

To study manners and conduct and men's moral nature in such a way, is as direct an error as it would be to overlook in the study of his body everything except its vertebral column and the bony framework. The body is more than mere anatomy. A character is much else besides being virtuous or vicious. In many of the characters in which some of the finest and most singular qualities of humanity would seem to have reached their furthest height, their morality was the side least worth discussing. The same may be said of the specific rightness or wrongness of opinion in the intellectual order. Let us condemn error or immorality, when the scope of our criticism calls for this particular function, but why rush to praise or blame, to eulogy or reprobation, when we should do

better simply to explore and enjoy? Moral imperfection is ever a grievous curtailment of life, but many exquisite flowers of character, many gracious and potent things, may still thrive in the most disordered scene.

The vast waste which this limitation of prospect entails is the most grievous rejection of moral treasure, if it be true that nothing enriches the nature like wide sympathy and many-coloured appreciativeness. To a man like Macaulay, for example, criticism was only a tribunal before which men were brought to be decisively tried by one or two inflexible tests, and then sent to join the sheep on the one hand, or the goats on the other. His pages are the record of sentences passed, not the presentation of human characters in all their fulness and colour; and the consequence is that even now and so soon, in spite of all their rhetorical brilliance, their hold on men has grown slack. Contrast the dim depths into which his essay on Johnson is receding, with the vitality as of a fine dramatic creation which exists in Mr. Carlyle's essay on the same man. Mr. Carlyle knows as well as Macaulay how blind and stupid a creed was English Toryism a century ago, but he seizes and reproduces the character of his man, and this was much more than a matter of a creed. So with Burns. He was drunken and unchaste and thriftless, and Mr. Carlyle holds all these vices as deeply in reprobation as if he had written ten thousand sermons against them; but he leaves the fulmination to the hack moralist of the

pulpit or the press, with whom words are cheap, easily gotten, and readily thrown forth. To him it seems better worth while, having made sure of some sterling sincerity and rare genuineness of vision and singular human quality, to dwell on, and do justice to that, than to accumulate commonplaces as to the viciousness of vice. Here we may perhaps find the explanation of the remarkable fact that though Mr. Carlyle has written about a large number of men of all varieties of opinion and temperament, and written with emphasis and point and strong feeling, yet there is hardly one of these judgments, however much we may dissent from it, which we could fairly put a finger upon as indecently absurd or futile. Of how many writers of thirty volumes can we say the same?

That this broad and poetic temper of criticism has special dangers, and needs to have special safeguards, is but too true. Even, however, if we find that it has its excesses, we may forgive much to the merits of a reaction against a system which has raised monstrous floods of sour cant round about us, and hardened the hearts and parched the sympathies of men by blasts from theological deserts. There is a point of view so lofty and so peculiar that from it we are able to discern in men and women something more than, and apart from, creed and profession and formulated principle; which indeed directs and colours this creed and principle as decisively as it is in its turn acted on by them, and this is their character or humanity. The least important thing about Johnson

is that he was a Tory; and about Burns, that he drank too much and was incontinent; and if we see in modern literature an increasing tendency to mount to this higher point of view, this humaner prospect, there is no living writer to whom we owe more for it than Mr. Carlyle. The same principle which revealed the valour and godliness of Puritanism, has proved its most efficacious solvent, for it places character on the pedestal where Puritanism places dogma.

The second of the qualities which seem to flow from Mr. Carlyle's fatalism, and one much less useful among such a people as the English, is a deficiency of sympathy with masses of men. It would be easy enough to find places where he talks of the dumb millions in terms of fine and sincere humanity, and his feeling for the common pathos of the human lot, as he encounters it in individual lives, is as earnest and as simple, as it is invariably lovely and touching in its expression. But detached passages cannot counterbalance the effect of a whole compact body of teaching. The multitude stands between Destiny on the one side, and the Hero on the other; a sport to the first, and as potter's clay to the second. '*Dogs, would ye then live for ever?*' Frederick is truly or fabulously said to have cried to a troop who hesitated to attack a battery vomiting forth death and destruction. This is a measure of Mr. Carlyle's own valuation of the store we ought to set on the lives of the most. We know in what coarse outcome

such an estimate of the dignity of other life than the life heroic has practically issued; in what barbarous vindication of barbarous law-breaking in Jamaica, in what inhuman softness for slavery, in what contemptuous and angry words for 'Beales and his 50,000 roughs,' contrasted with gentle words for our precious aristocracy, with 'the politest and gracefullest kind of woman' to wife. Here is the end of the Eternal Verities, when one lets them bulk so big in his eyes as to shut out that perishable speck, the human race.

'They seem to have seen, these brave old Northmen,' he says in one place, 'what Meditation has taught all men in all ages, that this world is after all but a show—a phenomenon or appearance, no real thing. All deep souls see into that.'[1] Yes; but deep souls dealing with the practical questions of society, do well to thrust the vision as far from them as they can, and to suppose that this world is no show, and happiness and misery not mere appearances, but the keenest realities that we can know. The difference between virtue and vice, between wisdom and folly, is only phenomenal, yet there is difference enough. '*What shadows we are, and what shadows we pursue!*' Burke cried in the presence of an affecting incident. Yet the consciousness of this made him none the less careful, minute, patient, systematic, in examining a policy, or criticising a tax. Mr. Carlyle, on the contrary, falls back on the same reflection for comfort in the face of political confusions and

[1] *Hero-Worship*, p. 43.

difficulties and details, which he has not the moral patience to encounter scientifically. Unable to dream of swift renovation and wisdom among men, he ponders on the unreality of life, and hardens his heart against generations that will not know the things that pertain unto their peace. He answers to one lifting up some moderate voice of protest in favour of the masses of mankind, as his Prussian hero did: '*Ah, you do not know that damned race!*'[1]

There is no passage which Mr. Carlyle so often quotes as the sublime—

> We are such stuff
> As dreams are made on; and our little life
> Is rounded with a sleep.

If the ever present impression of this awful, most moving, yet most soothing thought, be a law of spiritual breadth and height, there is still a peril in it. Such an impression may inform the soul with a devout mingled sense of grandeur and nothingness, or it may blacken into cynicism and antinomian living for self and the day. It may be a solemn and holy refrain, sounding far off but clear in the dusty course of work and duty; or it may be the comforting chorus of a diabolic drama of selfishness and violence. As a reaction against religious theories which make humanity over-abound in self-consequence, and fill individuals with the strutting importance of creatures with private souls to save or lose, even such cynicism

[1] Carlyle's *Frederick*, vi. 363.

as Byron's was wholesome and nearly forgivable. Nevertheless, the most important question that we can ask of any great teacher, as of the walk and conversation of any commonest person, remains this—how far has he strengthened and raised the conscious and harmonious dignity of humanity; how stirred in men and women, many or few, deeper and more active sense of the worth and obligation and innumerable possibilities, not of their own little lives, one or another, but of life collectively; how heightened the self-respect of the race? There is no need to plant oneself in a fool's paradise, with no eye for the weakness of men, the futility of their hopes, the irony of their fate, the dominion of the satyr and the tiger in their hearts. Laughter has a fore-place in life. All this we may see and show that we see, and yet so throw it behind the weightier facts of nobleness and sacrifice, of the boundless gifts which fraternal union has given, and has the power of giving, as to kindle in every breast, not callous to exalted impressions, the glow of sympathetic endeavour, and of serene exultation in the bond that makes 'precious the soul of man to man.'

This renewal of moral energy by spiritual contact with the mass of men, and by meditation on the destinies of mankind, is the very reverse of Mr. Carlyle's method. With him, it is good to leave the mass, and fall down before the individual, and be saved by him. The victorious hero is the true Paraclete. 'Nothing so lifts a man from all his mean imprisonments, were it but for moments, as true

admiration.' And this is really the kernel of the Carlylean doctrine. The whole human race toils and moils, straining and energising, doing and suffering things multitudinous and unspeakable under the sun, in order that like the aloe-tree it may once in a hundred years produce a flower. It is this hero that age offers to age, and the wisest worship him. Time and nature once and again distil from out of the lees and froth of common humanity some wondrous character, of a potent and reviving property hardly short of miraculous. This the man who knows his own good cherishes in his inmost soul as a sacred thing, an elixir of moral life. The Great Man is 'the light which enlightens, which has enlightened the darkness of the world; a flowing light fountain, in whose radiance all souls feel that it is well with them.' This is only another form of the anthropomorphic conceptions of deity. The divinity of the ordinary hierophant is clothed in the minds of the worshippers with the highest human qualities they happen to be capable of conceiving, and this is the self-acting machinery by which worship refreshes and recruits what is best in man. Mr. Carlyle has another way. He carries the process a step further, giving back to the great man what had been taken for beings greater than any man, and summoning us to trim the lamp of endeavour at the shrine of heroic chiefs of mankind. In that house there are many mansions, the boisterous sanctuary of a vagabond polytheism. But each altar is individual and apart,

and the reaction of this isolation upon the egotistic instincts of the worshipper has been only too evident. It is good for us to build temples to great names which recall special transfigurations of humanity; but it is better still, it gives a firmer nerve to purpose and adds a finer holiness to the ethical sense, to carry ever with us the unmarked, yet living tradition of the voiceless unconscious effort of unnumbered millions of souls, flitting lightly away like showers of thin leaves, yet ever augmenting the elements of perfectness in man, and exalting the eternal contest.

Mr. Carlyle has indeed written that generation stands indissolubly woven with generation; 'how we inherit, not Life only, but all the garniture and form of Life, and work and speak, and even think and feel, as our fathers and primeval grandfathers from the beginning have given it to us;' how 'mankind is a living, indivisible whole.'[1] Even this, however, with the 'literal communion of saints,' which follows in connection with it, is only a detached suggestion, not incorporated with the body of the writer's doctrine. It does not neutralise the general lack of faith in the cultivable virtue of masses of men, nor the universal tone of humoristic cynicism with which all but a little band, the supposed salt of the earth, are treated. Man is for Mr. Carlyle, as for the Calvinistic theologian, a fallen and depraved being, without much hope, except for a few of the elect. The best thing that can happen to the poor creature is that he should be thoroughly

[1] 'Organic Filaments' in the *Sartor*, bk. iii. ch. vii.

well drilled. In other words, society does not really progress in its bulk; and the methods which were conditions of the original formation and growth of the social union, remain indispensable until the sound of the last trump. Was there not a profound and far-reaching truth wrapped up in Geothe's simple yet really inexhaustible monition, that if we would improve a man, it were well to let him believe that we already think him that which we would have him to be. The law that *noblesse oblige* has unwritten bearings in dealing with all men; all masses of men are susceptible of an appeal from that point: for this Mr. Carlyle seems to make no allowance.

Every modification of society is one of the slow growths of time, and to hurry impatiently after them by swift ways of military discipline and peremptory law-making, is only to clasp the near and superficial good. It is easy to make a solitude and call it peace, to plant an iron heel and call it order. But read Mr. Carlyle's essay on Dr. Francia, and then ponder the history of Paraguay for these later years and the accounts of its condition in the newspapers of to-day. 'Nay, it may be,' we learn from that remarkable piece, 'that the benefit of him is not even yet exhausted, even yet entirely become visible. Who knows but, in unborn centuries, Paragueno men will look back to their lean iron Francia, as men do in such cases to the one veracious person, and institute considerations?'[1] Who knows, indeed, if only it

[1] *Misc. Ess.* vi. 124.

prove that their lean iron Francia, in his passion for order and authority, did not stamp out the very life of the nation? Where organic growths are concerned, patience is the sovereign law; and where the organism is a society of men, the vital principle is a sense in one shape or another of the dignity of humanity. The recognition of this tests the distinction between the truly heroic ruler of the stamp of Cromwell, and the arbitrary enthusiast for external order like Frederick. Yet in more than one place Mr. Carlyle accepts the fundamental principle of democracy. 'It is curious to consider now,' he says once, 'with what fierce, deep-breathed doggedness the poor English Nation, drawn by their instincts, held fast upon it [the Spanish War of Walpole's time, in Jenkins' Ear Question], and would take no denial of it, as if they had surmised and seen. For the instincts of simple, guileless persons (liable to be counted stupid by the unwary) are sometimes of prophetic nature, and spring from the deep places of this universe!'[1] If the writer of this had only thought it out to the end, and applied the conclusions thereof to history and politics, what a difference it would have made.

No criticism upon either Mr. Carlyle or any other modern historian, possessed of speculative quality, would be in any sense complete which should leave out of sight his view of the manner and significance of the break-up of the old European structure. The

[1] *Frederick*, iv. 390.

historian is pretty sure to be guided in his estimate of the forces which have contributed to dissolution in the past, by the kind of anticipation which he entertains of the probable course of reconstruction. Like Comte, in his ideas of temporal reconstruction, Mr. Carlyle goes back to something like the forms of feudalism for the model of the industrial organisation of the future; but in the spiritual order he is as far removed as possible from any semblance of that revival of the old ecclesiastical forms without the old theological ideas, which is the corner-stone of Comte's edifice. To the question whether mankind gained or lost by the French Revolution, Mr. Carlyle nowhere gives a clear answer; indeed, on this subject more even than any other, he clings closely to his favourite method of simple presentation, streaked with dramatic irony. No writer shows himself more alive to the enormous moment to all Europe of that transaction; but we hear no word from him on the question whether we have more reason to bless or curse an event that interrupted, either subsequently to retard or to accelerate, the transformation of the West from a state of war, of many degrees of social subordination, of religious privilege, of aristocratic administration, into a state of peaceful industry, of equal international rights, of social equality, of free and equal tolerance of creeds. That this process was going on prior to 1789 is undeniable. Are we really nearer to the permanent establishment of the new order, for what was done between 1789 and 1793? or were men thrown off

the right track of improvement by a movement which turned exclusively on abstract rights, which dealt with men's ideas and habits as if they were instantaneously pliable before the aspirations of any government, and which by its violent and inconsiderate methods drove all these who should only have been friends of order into being the enemies of progress as well? There are many able and honest and republican men who in their hearts suspect that the latter of the two alternatives is the more correct description of what has happened. Mr. Carlyle is as one who does not hear the question. He draws its general moral lesson from the French Revolution, and with clangorous note warns all whom it concerns, from king to churl, that imposture must come to an end. But for the precise amount and kind of dissolution which the West owes to it, for the political meaning of it, as distinguished from its moral or its dramatic significance, we seek in vain, finding no word on the subject, nor even evidence of consciousness that such word is needed.

The truth is that with Mr. Carlyle the Revolution begins not in 1789 but in 1741 ; not with the Fall of the Bastile but with the Battle of Mollwitz. This earliest of Frederick's victories was the first sign 'that indeed a new hour had struck on the Time Horologe, that a new Epoch had arisen. Slumberous Europe, rotting amid its blind pedantries, its lazy hypocrisies, conscious and unconscious : this man is capable of shaking it a little out of its stupid refuges

of lies and ignominious wrappages, and of intimating to it afar off that there is still a Veracity in Things, and a Mendacity in Sham Things,' and so forth, in the well-known strain.[1] It is impossible to overrate the truly supreme importance of the violent break-up of Europe which followed the death of the Emperor Charles VI., and in many respects 1740 is as important a date in the history of Western societies as 1789. Most of us would probably find the importance of this epoch in its destructive contribution, rather than in that constructive and moral quality which lay under the movement of '89. The Empire was thoroughly shattered. France was left weak, impoverished, humiliated. Spain was finally thrust from among the efficient elements in the European State-system. Most important of all, their too slight sanctity had utterly left the old conceptions of public law and international right. The whole polity of Europe was left in such a condition of disruption as had not been equalled since the death of Charles the Great. The Partition of Poland was the most startling evidence of the completeness of this disruption, and if one statesman was more to be praised or blamed for shaking over the fabric than another, that statesman was Frederick the Second of Prussia. But then, in Mr. Carlyle's belief, there was equally a constructive and highly moral side to all this. The old fell to pieces because it was internally rotten. The gospel of the new was

[1] *History of Frederick the Great*, iv. 328. See also vol. i., Proem.

that the government of men and kingdoms is a business beyond all others demanding an open-eyed accessibility to all facts and realities; that here more than anywhere else you need to give the tools to him who can handle them; that government does by no means go on of itself, but more than anything else in this world demands skill, patience, energy, long and tenacious grip, and the constant presence of that most indispensable, yet most rare, of all practical convictions, that the effect is the inevitable consequent of the cause. Here was a revolution, we cannot doubt. The French Revolution was in a manner a complement to it, as Mr. Carlyle himself says in a place where he talks of believing both in the French Revolution and in Frederick; 'that is to say both that Real Kingship is eternally indispensable, and also that the destruction of Sham Kingship (a frightful process) is occasionally so.'[1] It is curious that an observer who could see the positive side of Frederick's disruption of Europe in 1740, did not also see that there was a positive side to the disruption of the French monarchy fifty years afterwards, and that not only was a blow dealt to sham kingship, but a decisive impulse was given to those ideas of morality and justice in government, upon which only real kingship in whatever form is able to rest.

As to the other great factor in the dissolution of the old state, the decay of ancient spiritual forms, Mr. Carlyle gives no uncertain sound. Of the Refor-

[1] *Frederick the Great*, i. 9.

mation, as of the French Revolution, philosophers have doubted how far it really contributed to the stable progress of European civilisation. Would it have been better, if it had been possible, for the old belief gradually as by process of nature to fall to pieces, new doctrine as gradually and as normally emerging from the ground of disorganised and decayed convictions, without any of that frightful violence which stirred men's deepest passions, and gave them a sinister interest in holding one or other of the rival creeds in its most extreme, exclusive, and intolerant form? This question Mr. Carlyle does not see, or, if he does see it, he rides roughshod over it. Every reader remembers the notable passage in which he declares that the question of Protestant or not Protestant meant everywhere, 'Is there anything of nobleness in you, O Nation, or is there nothing?' and that afterwards it fared with nations as they did, or did not, accept this sixteenth century form of Truth when it came.[1]

France, for example, is the conspicuous proof of what overtook the deniers. 'France saw good to massacre Protestantism, and end it, in the night of St. Bartholomew, 1572. The celestial apparitor of heaven's chancery, so we may speak, the genius of Fact and Veracity, had left his writ of summons; writ was read and replied to in this manner.' But let us look at this more definitely. A complex series of historic facts do not usually fit so neatly into the

[1] *Frederick*, i. bk. iii. ch. viii. 269-274.

moral formula. The truth surely is that while the anxieties and dangers of the Catholic party in France increased after St. Bartholomew, whose dramatic horror has made its historic importance to be vastly exaggerated, the Protestant cause remained full of vitality, and the number of its adherents went on increasing until the Edict of Nantes. It is eminently unreasonable to talk of France seeing good to end Protestantism in a night, when we reflect that twenty-six years after, the provisions of the Edict of Nantes were what they were. 'By that Edict,' the historian tells us, 'the French Protestants, who numbered perhaps a tenth of the total population, 2,000,000 out of 20,000,000, obtained absolute liberty of conscience; performance of public worship in 3500 castles, as well as in certain specified houses in each province; a State endowment equal to £20,000 a year; civil rights equal in every respect to those of the Catholics; admission to the public colleges, hospitals, etc.; finally, eligibility to all offices of State.' It was this, and not the Massacre, which was France's reply to the Genius of Fact and Veracity. Again, on the other side, England accepted Protestantism, and yet Mr. Carlyle of all men can hardly pretend, after his memorable deliverances in the *Niagara*, that he thinks she has fared particularly well in consequence.

The famous diatribe against Jesuitism in the *Latter-Day Pamphlets*,[1] one of the most unfeignedly coarse and virulent bits of invective in the language,

[1] No. VIII. pp. 353-371.

points plumb in the same direction. It is grossly unjust, because it takes for granted that Loyola and all Jesuits were deliberately conscious of imposture and falsehood, knowingly embraced the cause of Beelzebub, and resolutely propagated it. It is one thing to judge a system in its corruption, and a quite other thing to measure the worth and true design of its first founders; one thing to estimate the intention and sincerity of a movement, when it first stirred the hearts of men, and another thing to pass sentence upon it in the days of its degradation. The vileness into which Jesuitism eventually sank is a poor reason why we should malign and curse those who, centuries before, found in the rules and discipline and aims of that system an acceptable expression for their own disinterested social aspirations. It is childish to say that the subsequent vileness is a proof of the existence of an inherent corrupt principle from the beginning; because hitherto certainly, and probably it will be so for ever, even the most salutary movements and most effective social conceptions have been provisional. In other words, the ultimate certainty of dissolution does not nullify the beauty and strength of physical life, and the putrescence of Jesuit methods and ideas is no more a reproach to those who first found succour in them, than the cant and formalism of any other degenerate form of active faith, say monachism or Calvinism, prove Calvin or Benedict or Bernard to have been hypocritical and hollow. To be able, however, to take this reasonable view, one must be unable

to believe that men can be drawn for generation after generation by such a mere hollow lie and villainy and 'light of hell' as Jesuitism has always been, according to Mr. Carlyle's rendering. Human nature is not led for so long by lies; and if it seems to be otherwise, let us be sure that ideas which do lead and attract successive generations of men to self-sacrifice and care for social interests, must contain something which is not wholly a lie.

Perhaps it is pertinent to remember that Mr. Carlyle, in fact, is a prophet with a faith, and he holds the opposition kind of religionist in a peculiarly theological execration. In spite of his passion for order, he cannot understand the political point of view. The attempts of good men in epochs of disorder to remake the past, to bring back an old spiritual system and method, because that did once at any rate give shelter to mankind, and peradventure may give it to them again until better times come, are phenomena into which he cannot look with calm or patience. The great reactionist is a type that is wholly dark to him. That a reactionist can be great, can be a lover of virtue and truth, can in any sort contribute to the welfare of men, these are possibilities to which he will lend no ear. In a word, he is a prophet and not a philosopher, and it is fruitless to go to him for help in the solution of philosophic problems. This is not to say that he may not render us much help in those far more momentous problems which affect the guidance of our own lives.

BYRON.

It is one of the singular facts in the history of literature, that the most rootedly conservative country in Europe should have produced the poet of the Revolution. Nowhere is the antipathy to principles and ideas so profound, nor the addiction to moderate compromise so inveterate, nor the reluctance to advance away from the past so unconquerable, as in England; and nowhere in England is there so settled an indisposition to regard any thought or sentiment except in the light of an existing social order, nor so firmly passive a hostility to generous aspirations, as in the aristocracy. Yet it was precisely an English aristocrat who became the favourite poet of all the most high-minded conspirators and socialists of continental Europe for half a century; of the best of those, that is to say, who have borne the most unsparing testimony against the present ordering of society, and against the theological and moral conceptions which have guided and maintained it. The rank and file of the army has been equally inspired by the same fiery and rebellious strains against the order of God and the order of man.

'The day will come,' wrote Mazzini, thirty years ago, 'when Democracy will remember all that it owes to Byron. England, too, will, I hope, one day remember the mission—so entirely English yet hitherto overlooked by her—which Byron fulfilled on the Continent; the European rôle given by him to English literature, and the appreciation and sympathy for England which he awakened amongst us. Before he came, all that was known of English literature was the French translation of Shakespeare, and the anathema hurled by Voltaire against the "drunken savage." It is since Byron that we Continentalists have learned to study Shakespeare and other English writers. From him dates the sympathy of all the true-hearted amongst us for this land of liberty, whose true vocation he so worthily represented among the oppressed. He led the genius of Britain on a pilgrimage throughout all Europe.'[1]

The day of recollection has not yet come. It is only in his own country that Byron's influence has been a comparatively superficial one, and its scope and gist dimly and imperfectly caught, because it is

[1] See also George Sand's Preface to *Obermann*, p. 10. '*En même temps que les institutions et les coutumes, la littérature anglaise passa le détroit, et vint regner chez nous. La poésie britannique nous révéla le doute incarné sous la figure de Byron; puis la littérature allemande, quoique plus mystique, nous conduisit au même résultat par un sentiment de rêverie plus profond.*'

The number of translations that have appeared in Germany since 1830 proves the coincidence of Byronic influence with revolutionary movement in that country.

only in England that the partisans of order hope to mitigate or avoid the facts of the Revolution by pretending not to see them, while the friends of progress suppose that all the fruits of change shall inevitably fall, if only they keep the forces and processes and extent of the change rigorously private and undeclared. That intense practicalness which seems to have done so many great things for us, and yet at the same moment mysteriously to have robbed us of all, forbids us even to cast a glance at what is no more than an aspiration. Englishmen like to be able to answer about the Revolution as those ancients answered about the symbol of another Revolution, when they said that they knew not so much as whether there were a Holy Ghost or not. The same want of kindling power in the national intelligence which made of the English Reformation one of the most sluggish and tedious chapters in our history, has made the still mightier advance of the moderns from the social system and spiritual bases of the old state, in spite of our two national achievements of punishing a king with death and emancipating our slaves, just as unimpressive and semi-efficacious a performance in this country, as the more affrontingly hollow and halt-footed transactions of the sixteenth century.

Just because it was wonderful that England should have produced Byron, it would have been wonderful if she had received any permanently deep impression from him, or preserved a lasting appreciation of his

work, or cheerfully and intelligently recognised his immense force. And accordingly we cannot help perceiving that generations are arising who know not Byron. This is not to say that he goes unread; but there is a vast gulf fixed between the author whom we read with pleasure and even delight, and that other to whom we turn at all moments for inspiration and encouragement, and whose words and ideas spring up incessantly and animatingly within us, unbidden, whether we turn to him or no.

For no Englishman now does Byron hold this highest place; and this is not unnatural in any way, if we remember in what a different shape the Revolution has now by change of circumstance and occasion come to present itself to those who are most ardent in the search after new paths. An estimate of Byron would be in some sort a measure of the distance that we have travelled within the last half century in our appreciation of the conditions of social change. The modern rebel is at least half-acquiescence. He has developed a historic sense. The most hearty aversion to the prolonged reign of some of the old gods does not hinder him from seeing, that what are now frigid and unlovely blocks were full of vitality and light in days before the era of their petrifaction. There is much less eagerness of praise or blame, and much less faith in knife and cautery, less confidence that new and right growth will naturally and necessarily follow upon demolition.

The Revolution has never had that long hold on

the national imagination in England, either as an idol or a bugbear, which is essential to keep the poet who sings it in effective harmony with new generations of readers. More than this, the Byronic conception was as transitional and inadequate as the methods and ideas of the practical movers, who were to a man left stranded in every country in Europe, during the period of his poetic activity. A transitional and unstable movement of society inevitably fails to supply a propulsion powerful enough to make its poetic expression eternal. There is no better proof of the enormous force of Byron's genius than that it was able to produce so fine an expression of elements so intrinsically unfavourable to high poetry as doubt, denial, antagonism, and weariness. But this force was no guarantee for perpetuity of influence. Bare rebellion cannot endure, and no succession of generations can continue nourishing themselves on the poetry of complaint, and the idealisation of revolt. If, however, it is impossible that Byron should be all to us that he was to a former generation, and if we find no direct guidance in his muse, this is no reason why criticism should pass him over, nor why there may not be something peculiarly valuable in the noble freedom and genuine modernism of his poetic spirit, to an age that is apparently only forsaking the clerical idyll of one school, for the reactionary mediævalism or paganism, intrinsically meaningless and issueless, of another.

More attention is now paid to the mysteries of Byron's life than to the merits of his work, and

criticism and morality are equally injured by the confusion between the worth of the verse he wrote, and the virtue or wickedness of the life he lived. The admirers of his poetry appear sensible of some obligation to be the champions of his conduct, while those who have diligently gathered together the details of an accurate knowledge of the unseemliness of his conduct, cannot bear to think that from this bramble men have been able to gather figs. The result of the confusion has been that grave men and women have applied themselves to investigate and judge Byron's private life, as if the exact manner of it, the more or less of his outrages upon decorum, the degree of the deadness of his sense of moral responsibility, were matter of minute and profound interest to all ages. As if all this had anything to do with criticism proper. It is right that we should know the life and manners of one whom we choose for a friend, or of one who asks us to entrust him with the control of public interests. In either of these two cases, we need a guarantee for present and future. Art knows nothing of guarantees. The work is before us, its own warranty. What is it to us whether Turner had coarse orgies with the trulls of Wapping? We can judge his art without knowing or thinking of the artist. And in the same way, what are the stories of Byron's libertinism to us? They may have biographical interest, but of critical interest hardly the least. If the name of the author of *Manfred*, *Cain*, *Childe Harold*, were already lost, as it may be in remote

times, the work abides, and its mark on European opinion. '*Je ne considère les gens après leur mort*,' said Voltaire, '*que par leurs ouvrages; tout le reste est anéanti pour moi.*'

There is a sense in which biographical detail gives light to criticism, but not the sense in which the prurient moralist uses or seeks it. The life of the poet may help to explain the growth and prominence of a characteristic sentiment or peculiar idea. Knowledge of this or that fact in his life may uncover the roots of something that strikes, or unravel something that perplexes us. Considering the relations between a man's character and circumstance, and what he produces, we can from this point of view hardly know too much as to the personality of a great writer. Only let us recollect that this personality manifests itself outwardly in two separate forms, in conduct, and in literary production, and that each of these manifestations is to be judged independently of the other. If one of them is wholly censurable, the other may still be the outcome of the better mind; and even from the purely biographical aspect, it is a plain injustice to insist on identifying a character with its worse expression only.

Poetry, and not only poetry, but every other channel of emotional expression and æsthetic culture, confessedly moves with the general march of the human mind, and art is only the transformation into ideal and imaginative shapes of a predominant system

and philosophy of life. Minor verse-writers may fairly be consigned, without disrespect, to the region of the literature of taste; and criticism of their work takes the shape of a discussion of stray graces, of new turns, of little variations of shade and colour, of their conformity to the accepted rules that constitute the technique of poetry. The loftier masters, though their technical power and originality, their beauty of form, strength of flight, music and variousness of rhythm, are all full of interest and instruction, yet, besides these precious gifts, come to us with the size and quality of great historic forces, for they represent the hope and energies, the dreams and the consummation, of the human intelligence in its most enormous movements. To appreciate one of these, we need to survey it on every side. For these we need synthetic criticism, which, after analysis has done its work, and disclosed to us the peculiar qualities of form, conception, and treatment, shall collect the products of this first process, construct for us the poet's mental figure in its integrity and just coherence, and then finally, as the sum of its work, shall trace the relations of the poet's ideas, either direct or indirect, through the central currents of thought, to the visible tendencies of an existing age.

The greatest poets reflect beside all else the broad-bosomed haven of a perfect and positive faith, in which mankind has for some space found shelter, unsuspicious of the new and distant wayfarings that are ever in store. To this band of sacred bards few

are called, while perhaps not more than four high names would fill the list of the chosen: Dante, the poet of Catholicism; Shakespeare, of Feudalism; Milton, of Protestantism; Goethe, of that new faith which is as yet without any universally recognised label, but whose heaven is an ever-closer harmony between the consciousness of man and all the natural forces of the universe; whose liturgy is culture, and whose deity is a certain high composure of the human heart.

The far-shining pre-eminence of Shakespeare, apart from the incomparable fertility and depth of his natural gifts, arises secondarily from the larger extent to which he transcended the special forming influences, and refreshed his fancy and widened his range of sympathy, by recourse to what was then the nearest possible approach to a historic or political method. To the poet, vision reveals a certain form of the truth, which the rest of men laboriously discover and prove by the tardier methods of meditation and science. Shakespeare did not walk in imagination with the great warriors, monarchs, churchmen, and rulers of history, nor conceive their conduct, ideas, schemes, and throw himself into their words and actions, without strengthening that original taste which must have first drawn him to historical subjects, and without deepening both his feeling for the great progression of human affairs, and his sympathy for those relative moods of surveying and dealing with them, which are not more positive, scientific, and political, than they may be made truly poetic.

Again, while in Dante the inspiring force was spiritual, and in Goethe it was intellectual, we may say that both in Shakespeare and Milton it was political and social. In other words, with these two, the drama of the one and the epic of the other were each of them connected with ideas of government and the other external movements of men in society, and with the play of the sentiments which spring from them. We assuredly do not mean that in either of them, least of all in Shakespeare, there is an absence of the spiritual element. This would be at once to thrust them down into a lower place; for the spiritual is of the very essence of poetry. But with the spiritual there mixes in our Englishmen a most abundant leaven of recognition of the impressions and impulses of the outer forms of life, as well as of active sympathy with the every-day debate of the world. They are neither of them inferior to the highest in sense of the wide and unutterable things of the spirit; yet with both of them, more than with other poets of the same rank, the man with whose soul and circumstance they have to deal is the *πολιτικὸν ζῷον*, no high abstraction of the race, but the creature with concrete relations and a full objective life. In Shakespeare the dramatic form helps partly to make this more prominent, though the poet's spirit shines forth thus, independently of the mould which it imposes on itself. Of Milton we may say, too, that, in spite of the supernatural machinery of his greatest poem, it bears strongly impressed on it the political mark, and that in those

minor pieces, where he is avowedly in the political sphere, he still rises to the full height of his majestic harmony and noblest dignity.

Byron was touched by the same fire. The contemporary and friend of the most truly spiritual of all English poets, Shelley, he was himself among the most essentially political. Or perhaps one will be better understood, describing his quality as a quality of poetical *worldliness*, in its enlarged and generous sense of energetic interest in real transactions, and a capacity of being moved and raised by them into those lofty moods of emotion which in more spiritual natures are only kindled by contemplation of the vast infinitudes that compass the human soul round about. That Shelley was immeasurably superior to Byron in all the rarer qualities of the specially poetic mind appears to us so unmistakably assured a fact, that difference of opinion upon it can only spring from a more fundamental difference of opinion as to what it is that constitutes this specially poetic quality. If more than anything else it consists in the power of transfiguring action, character, and thought, in the serene radiance of the purest imaginative intelligence, and the gift of expressing these transformed products in the finest articulate vibrations of emotional speech, then must we not confess that Byron has composed no piece which from this point may compare with *Prometheus* or the *Cenci*, any more than Rubens may take his place with Raphael? We feel that Shelley transports the spirit to the highest

bound and limit of the intelligible; and that with him thought passes through one superadded and more rarefying process than the other poet is master of. If it be true, as has been written, that 'Poetry is the breath and finer spirit of all knowledge,' we may say that Shelley teaches us to apprehend that further something, the breath and finer spirit of poetry itself. Contrasting, for example, Shelley's *Ode to the West Wind*, with the famous and truly noble stanzas on the eternal sea which close the fourth canto of *Childe Harold*, who does not feel that there is in the first a volatile and unseizable element that is quite distinct from the imagination and force and high impressiveness, or from any indefinable product of all of these united, which form the glory and power of the second? We may ask in the same way whether *Manfred*, where the spiritual element is as predominant as it ever is in Byron, is worth half a page of *Prometheus*.

To perceive and admit this is not to disparage Byron's achievements. To be most deeply penetrated with the differentiating quality of the poet is not, after all, to contain the whole of that admixture of varying and moderating elements which goes to the composition of the broadest and most effective work. Of these elements, Shelley, with all his rare gifts of spiritual imagination and winged melodiousness of verse, was markedly wanting in a keen and omnipresent feeling for the great course of human events. All nature stirred him, except the consummating crown of natural growth.

We do not mean anything so untrue as that Shelley was wanting either in deep humanity or in active benevolence, or that social injustice was a thing indifferent to him. We do not forget the energetic political propagandism of his youth in Ireland and elsewhere. Many a furious stanza remains to show how deeply and bitterly the spectacle of this injustice burnt into his soul. But these pieces are accidents. They do not belong to the immortal part of his work. An American original, unconsciously bringing the revolutionary mind to the climax of all utterances possible to it, has said that 'men are degraded when considered as the members of a political organisation.'[1] Shelley's position was on a yet more remote pinnacle than this. Of mankind he was barely conscious, in his loftiest and divinest flights. His muse seeks the vague translucent spaces where the care of man melts away in vision of the eternal forces, of which man may be but the fortuitous manifestation of an hour.

Byron, on the other hand, is never moved by the strength of his passion or the depth of his contemplation quite away from the round earth and the civil animal who dwells upon it. Even his misanthropy is only an inverted form of social solicitude. His practical zeal for good and noble causes might teach us this. He never grudged either money or time or personal peril for the cause of Italian freedom, and his life was the measure and the cost of his interest in the liberty of Greece. Then again he was full not merely of wit,

[1] Thoreau.

which is sometimes only an affair of the tongue, but of humour also, which goes much deeper; and it is of the essence of the humoristic nature, that whether sunny or saturnine, it binds the thoughts of him who possesses it to the wide medley of expressly human things. Byron did not misknow himself, nor misapprehend the most marked turn of his own character, when he wrote the lines—

> I love not Man the less, but Nature more,
> From these our interviews, in which I steal
> From all I may be, or have been before,
> To mingle with the universe and feel
> What I can ne'er express, yet cannot all conceal.

It was this which made Byron a social force, a far greater force than Shelley either has been or can be. Men read in each page that he was one of like passions with themselves; that he had their own feet of clay, if he had other members of brass and gold and fine silver which they had none of; and that vehement sensibility, tenacious energy of imagination, a bounding swell of poetic fancy, had not obliterated, but had rather quickened, the sense of the highest kind of man of the world, which did not decay but waxed stronger in him with years. His openness to beauty and care for it were always inferior in keenness and in hold upon him to his sense of human interest, and the superiority in certain respects of *Marino Faliero*, for example, where he handles a social theme in a worthy spirit, over *Manfred*, where he seeks a something tumultuously beautiful, is due to that subordi

nation in his mind of æsthetic to social intention, which is one of the most strongly distinctive marks of the truly modern spirit. The admirable wit both of his letters, and of pieces like the *Vision of Judgment* and *Don Juan*, where wit reaches as high as any English writer has ever carried it, shows in another way the same vividness and reality of attraction which every side of human affairs possessed for this glowing and incessantly animated spirit.

In spite of a good many surface affectations, which may have cheated the lighter heads, but which may now be easily seen through, and counted off for as much as they are worth, Byron possessed a bottom of plain sincerity and rational sobriety which kept him substantially straight, real, and human, and made him the genuine exponent of that immense social movement which we sum up as the Revolution. If Keats's whole soul was absorbed by sensuous impressions of the outer world, and his art was the splendid and exquisite reproduction of these; if Shelley on the other hand distilled from the fine impressions of the senses by process of inmost meditation some thrice ethereal essence, 'the viewless spirit of a lovely sound;' we may say of Byron that, even in the moods when the mightiness and wonder of nature had most effectually possessed themselves of his imagination, his mind never moved for very long on these remote heights, apart from the busy world of men, but returned again like the fabled dove from the desolate void of waters to the ark of mortal stress

and human passion. Nature, in her most dazzling aspects or stupendous parts, is but the background and theatre of the tragedy of man.

We may find a secondary proof of this in the fewness of those fine descriptive strokes and subtle indirect touches of colour or sound which arise with incessant spontaneity, where a mastering passion for nature steeps the mind in vigilant, accurate, yet half-unconscious, observation. It is amazing through how long a catalogue of natural objects Byron sometimes takes us, without affixing to one of them any but the most conventional term, or a single epithet which might show that in passing through his mind it had yielded to him a beauty or a savour that had been kept a secret from the common troop. Byron is certainly not wanting in commanding image, as when Manfred likens the lines of foaming light flung along from the Alpine cataract to 'the pale courser's tail, the giant steed, to be bestrode by Death.' But imaginative power of this kind is not the same thing as that susceptibility to the minutest properties and unseen qualities of natural objects which reveals itself in chance epithet of telling felicity, or phrase that opens to us hidden lights. Our generation is more likely to think too much than too little of this ; for its favourite poet, however narrow in subject and feeble in moral treatment, is without any peer in the exquisitely original, varied, and imaginative art of his landscape touches.

This treatment of nature was in exact harmony with the method of revolutionary thought, which,

from the time of Rousseau downwards, had appealed in its profound weariness of an existing social state to the solitude and seeming freedom of mountain and forest and ocean, as though the only cure for the woes of civilisation lay in annihilating it. This was an appeal less to nature than from man, just as we have said that Byron's was, and hence it was distinct from the single-eyed appreciation and love of nature for her own sake, for her beauty and terror and unnumbered moods, which has made of her the mistress and the consoler of many men in these times. In the days of old faith while the catholic gods sat yet firm upon their thrones, the loveliness of the universe shone to blind eyes. Saint Bernard in the twelfth century could ride for a whole day along the shore of the Lake of Geneva, and yet when in the evening his comrades spoke some word about the lake, he inquired: 'What lake?'[1] It was not mere difference of temperament that made the preacher of one age pass by in this marvellous unconsciousness, and the singer of another burst forth into that tender invocation of 'clear placid Leman,' whose 'contrasted lake with the wild world he dwelt in' moved him to the very depths. To Saint Bernard the world was as wild and confused as it was to Byron; but then he had gods many and saints many, and a holy church in this world, and a kingdom of heaven awaiting resplendent in the world to come. All this filled his soul with a settled certitude, too absorbing to leave

[1] Morison's *Life of St. Bernard*, p. 68 (2d edit.)

any space for other than religious emotion. The seven centuries that flowed between the spiritual mind of Europe when Saint Bernard was its spokesman, and the spiritual mind of which Byron was the interpreter, had gradually dissolved these certitudes, and the faint lines of new belief and a more durable order were still invisible. The assurance of science was not yet rooted, nor had men as yet learned to turn back to the history of their own kind, to the long chronicle of its manifold experiences, for an adequate system of life and an inspiring social faith. So they fled in spirit or in flesh into unfamiliar scenes, and vanished from society, because society was not sufficiently social.

The feeling was abnormal, and the method was fundamentally artificial. A sentimentalism arose, which is in art what the metaphysical method is in philosophy. Yet a literature was born of it, whose freshness, force, elevation, and, above all, a self-assertion and peculiar aspiring freedom that have never been surpassed, still exert an irresistible attraction, even over minds that are furthest removed from the moral storm and disorder, and the confused intellectual convictions, of that extraordinary group. Perhaps the fact that their active force is spent, and that men find in them now only a charm and no longer a gospel, explains the difference between the admiration which some of us permit ourselves to feel for them, and the impatient dislike which they stirred in our fathers. Then they were a danger, because they were a force, misleading amiable and highminded

people into blind paths. Now this is at an end, and, apart from their historic interest, the permanent elements of beauty draw us to them with a delight that does not diminish, as we recede further and further from the impotence of the aspirations which thus married themselves to lofty and stirring words. To say nothing of Rousseau, the father and founder of the nature-worship, which is the nearest approach to a positive side that the Revolution has ever possessed, how much fine colour and freshness of feeling there is in *Réné*, what a sense of air and space in *Paul and Virginia*, and what must they have been to a generation that had just emerged from the close parlours of Richardson, the best of the sentimentalists of the præ-revolutionary type? May we not say, too, in parenthesis, that the man is the votary, not of wisdom, but of a bald and shapeless asceticism, who is so excessively penetrated with the reality, the duties, the claims, and the constant hazards of civilisation, as to find in himself no chord responsive to that sombre pensiveness into which Obermann's unfathomable melancholy and impotence of will deepened, as he meditated on the mean shadows which men are content to chase for happiness, and on all the pigmy progeny of giant effort? '*C'est peu de chose*,' says Obermann, '*de n'être point comme le vulgaire des hommes; mais c'est avoir fait un pas vers la sagesse, que de n'être plus comme le vulgaire des sages.*' This penetrating remark hits the difference between De Senancourt himself and most of the school. He is absolutely

free from the vulgarity of wisdom, and breathes the air of higher peaks, taking us through mysterious and fragrant pine-woods, where more than he may find meditative repose amid the heat and stress of that practical day, of which he and his school can never bear the burden.

In that *vulgaire des sages*, of which De Senancourt had none, Byron abounded. His work is in much the glorification of revolutionary commonplace. Melodramatic individualism reaches its climax in that long series of Laras, Conrads, Manfreds, Harolds, who present the fatal trilogy, in which crime is middle term between debauch and satiety, that forms the natural development of an anti-social doctrine in a full-blooded temperament. It was this temperament which, blending with his gifts of intellect, gave Byron the amazing copiousness and force that makes him the dazzling master of revolutionary emotion, because it fills his work with such variety of figures, such free change of incident, such diversity of passion, such a constant movement and agitation. It was this never-ceasing stir, coupled with a striking concreteness and an unfailing directness, which rather than any markedly correct or wide intellectual apprehension of things, made him so much more than any one else an effective interpreter of the moral tumult of the epoch. If we look for psychological delicacy, for subtle moral traits, for opening glimpses into unobserved depths of character, behold, none of these things are there. These were no gifts of his, any

more than the divine gift of music was his. There are some writers whose words but half express the indefinable thoughts that inspired them, and to whom we have to surrender our whole minds with a peculiar loyalty and fulness, independent of the letter and printed phrase, if we would liquefy the frozen speech and recover some portion of its imprisoned essence. This is seldom a necessity with Byron. His words tell us all that he means to say, and do not merely hint nor suggest. The matter with which he deals is gigantic, and he paints with violent colours and sweeping pencil.

Yet he is free from that declamation with which some of the French poets of the same age, and representing a portion of the same movement, blow out their cheeks. An angel of reasonableness seems to watch over him, even when he comes most dangerously near to an extravagance. He is equally free from a strained antithesis, which would have been inconsistent, not only with the breadth of effect required by Byron's art, but also with the peculiarly direct and forcible quality of his genius. In the preface to *Marino Faliero*, a composition that abounds in noble passages, and rests on a fine and original conception of character, he mentions his 'desire of preserving a nearer approach to unity, than the irregularity which is the reproach of the English theatre.' And this sound view of the importance of form, and of the barbarism to which our English

genius is prone, from *Goody Blake and Harry Gill* up to the clownish savagery which occasionally defaces even plays attributed to Shakespeare, is collateral proof of the sanity and balance which marked the foundations of his character, and which at no point of his work ever entirely failed him. Byron's admiration for Pope was no mere eccentricity.

We may value this self-control the more, by remembering the nature of his subjects. We look out upon a wild revolutionary welter, of vehement activity without a purpose, boundless discontent without a hope, futile interrogation of nature in questions for which nature can have no answer, unbridled passion, despairing satiety, impotence. It is too easy, as the history of English opinion about Byron's poetic merit abundantly proves, to underrate the genius which mastered so tremendous a conflict, and rendered that amazing scene with the flow and energy and mingled tempest and forlorn calm which belonged to the original reality. The essential futility of the many moods which went to make up all this, ought not to blind us to the enormous power that was needed for the reproduction of a turbulent and not quite aimless chaos of the soul, in which man seemed to be divorced alike from his brother-men in the present, and from all the long succession and endeavour of men in the past. It was no small feat to rise to a height that should command so much, and to exhibit with all the force of life a world that had broken loose from its moorings.

It is idle to vituperate this anarchy, either from the point of view of a sour and precise Puritanism, or the more elevated point of a rational and large faith in progress. Wise men are like Burke, who did not know how to draw an indictment against a whole nation. They do not know how to think nothing but ill of a whole generation, that lifted up its voice in heartfelt complaint and wailing against the conceptions, forms, and rulers, human and divine, of a society that the inward faith had abandoned, but which clung to every outward ordinance; which only remembered that man had property, and forgot that he had a spirit. This is the complaint that rings through Byron's verse. It was this complaint that lay deep at the bottom of the Revolution, and took form in every possible kind of protest, from a dishevelled neckcloth up to a profession of atheism. Byron elaborated the common emotion, as the earliest modern poets elaborated the common speech. He gave it inflections, and distinguished its moods, and threw over it an air of system and coherency, and a certain goodly and far-reaching sonorousness. This is the usual function of the spiritual leader, who leaves in bulk no more in the minds of those whom he attracts than he found, but he leaves it articulate with many sounds, and vivid with the consciousness of a multitude of defined impressions.

That the whole movement, in spite of its energy, was crude, unscientific, virtually abortive, is most true. That it was presided over by a false conception

of nature as a benign and purifying power, while she is in truth a stern force to be tamed and mastered, if society is to hold together, cannot be denied of the revolutionary movement then, any more than it can be denied of its sequels now. Nor need we overlook its fundamental error of tracing half the misfortunes and woes of the race to that social union, to which we are really indebted for all the happiness we know, including even this dignifying sensibility of the woes of the race; and the other half to a fictitious entity styled destiny, placed among the nethermost gods, which would be more rightly regarded as the infinitely modifiable influence exercised by one generation of ourselves upon those that follow.

Every one of these faults of thought is justly chargeable to Byron. They were deeply inherent in the Revolution. They coloured thoughts about government, about laws, about morals. They effected a transformation of religion, but, resting on no basis of philosophical acceptance of history, the transformation was only temporary. They spread a fantastic passion of which Byron was himself an example and a victim, for extraordinary outbreaks of a peculiar kind of material activity, that met the exigences of an imperious will, while it had not the irksomeness of the self-control which would have exercised the will to more permanent profit. They destroyed faith in order, natural or social, actual or potential, and substituted for it an enthusiastic assertion of the claims of the individual to make his pas-

sions, aspirations, and convictions, a final and decisive law.

Such was the moral state which Byron had to render and interpret. His relation to it was a relation of exact sympathy. He felt the force of each of the many currents that united in one destructive stream, wildly overflowing the fixed banks, and then, when it had overflowed, often, it must be confessed, stagnating in lazy brackish pools, while new tributaries began to flow in together from far other quarters. The list of his poems is the catalogue of the elements of the revolutionary spirit. For of what manner is this spirit? Is it not a masterful and impatient yearning after many good things, unsubdued and uninformed either by a just knowledge of the time, and the means which are needed to bring to men the fruits of their hope, or by a fit appreciation of orderly and tranquil activity for the common service, as the normal type of the individual life? And this is precisely the temper and the spirit of Byron. Nowhere else do we see drawn in such traits that colossal figure, which has haunted Europe these fourscore years and more, with its new-born passion, its half-controlled will, its constant cry for a multitude of unknown blessings under the single name of Freedom, the one known and unadulterated word of blessing. If only Truth, which alone of words is essentially divine and sacrosanct, had been the chief talisman of the Revolution, the movement would have been very different from that which we know. But to claim this or that in

the name of truth, would have been to borrow the language which priests and presbyters, Dominic and Calvin, had covered thick with hateful associations. Freedom, after all, was the next best thing, for it is an indispensable condition of the best of all; but it could not lead men until the spirit of truth, which means science in the intellectual order, and justice in the social order, had joined company with it.

So there was violent action in politics, and violent and excessive stimulation in literature, the positive effects of the force moved in each sphere being deplorably small in proportion to the intense moral energy which gave the impulse. In literature the straining for mental liberty was the more futile of the two, because it expressed the ardent and hopeless longing of the individual for a life which we may perhaps best call life unconditioned. And this unconditioned life, which the Byronic hero vainly seeks, and not finding, he fills the world with stormy complaint, is least of all likely to offer itself in any approximate form to men penetrated with gross and egotistical passions to their inmost core. The Byronic hero went to clasp repose in a frenzy. All crimson and aflame with passion, he groaned for evening stillness. He insisted on being free, in the corroding fetters of resentment and scorn for men. Conrad sought balm for disappointment of spirit in vehement activity of body. Manfred represents the confusion common to the type, between thirst for the highest knowledge and proud violence of unbridled will.

Harold is held in a middle way of poetic melancholy, equally far from a speechless despair and from gay and reckless licence, by contemplation of the loveliness of external nature, and the great exploits and perishing monuments of man in the past; but he, equally with the others, embodies the paradoxical hope that angry isolation and fretful estrangement from mankind are equivalent to emancipation from their pettiness, instead of being its very climax and demonstration. As if freedom of soul could exist without orderly relations of intelligence and partial acceptance between a man and the sum of surrounding circumstances. That universal protest which rings through Byron's work with a plangent resonance, very different from the whimperings of punier men, is a proof that so far from being free, one's whole being is invaded and laid waste. It is no ignoble mood, and it was a most inevitable product of the mental and social conditions of Western Europe at the close of the eighteenth century. Everlasting protest, impetuous energy of will, melancholy and despondent reaction;—this is the revolutionary course. Cain and Conrad; then Manfred and Lara and Harold.

In studying that portion of the European movement which burst forth into flame in France between the fall of the Bastille and those fatal days of Vendémiaire, Fructidor, Floréal, Brumaire, in which the explosion came convulsively to its end, we seem to see a micro-

cosm of the Byronic epos. The succession of moods is identical. Overthrow, rage, intense material energy, crime, profound melancholy, half-cynical dejection. The Revolution was the battle of Will against the social forces of a dozen centuries. Men thought that they had only to will the freedom and happiness of a world, and all nature and society would be plastic before their daring, as clay in the hands of the potter. They could only conceive of failure as another expression for inadequate will. Is not this one of the notes of Byron's *Ode on the Fall of Bonaparte?* '*L'audace, l'audace, et toujours l'audace.*' If Danton could have read Byron, he would have felt as one in front of a magician's glass. Every passion and fit, from the bloody days of September down to the gloomy walks by the banks of the Aube, and the prison-cry that 'it were better to be a poor fisherman than to meddle with the governing of men,' would have found itself there. It is true that in Byron we miss the firmness of noble and generous hope. This makes him a more veritable embodiment of the Revolution than such a precursor as Rousseau, in whom were all the unclouded anticipations of a dawn, that opened to an obscured noon and a tempestuous night. Yet one knows not, in truth, how much of that violence of will and restless activity and resolute force was due less to confidence, than to the urgent necessity which every one of us has felt, at some season and under some influence, of filling up spiritual vacuity by energetic material activity. Was this the secret of the mysterious charm

that scenes of violent strife and bloodshed always had for Byron's imagination, as it was perhaps the secret of the black transformation of the social faith of '89 into the worship of the Conqueror of '99? Nowhere does Byron's genius show so much of its own incomparable fire and energy, nor move with such sympathetic firmness and amplitude of pinion, as in *Lara*, the *Corsair*, *Harold*, and other poems, where 'Red Battle stamps his foot,' and where

> The giant on the mountain stands,
> His blood-red tresses deep'ning in the sun,
> With death-shot glowing in his fiery hands,
> And eye that scorcheth all it glows upon.

Yet other and intrinsically nobler passages, where this splendid imaginative energy of the sensations is replaced by the calmer glow of social meditation, prove that Byron was penetrated with the distinctively modern scorn and aversion for the military spirit, and the distinctively modern conviction of its being the most deadly of anachronisms. Such indirect satisfaction to the physical energies was to him, as their direct satisfaction was to the disillusioned France of '99, the relief demanded by a powerful nature for the impotence of hope and vision.

However this may have been, it may be confessed that Byron presents less of the flame of his revolutionary prototypes, and too much of the ashes. He came at the end of the experiment. But it is only a question of proportion. The ashes belong as much and as necessarily to the methods of the Revolution

in that phase, as do the blaze, that first told men of possible light and warmth, and the fire, which yet smoulders with abundant life underneath the gray cinders. And we have to remember that Byron came in the midst of a reaction; a reaction of triumph for the partisans of darkness and obstruction, who were assured that the exploded fragments of the old order would speedily grow together again, and a reaction of despondency for those who had filled themselves with illimitable and peremptory hopes. Silly Byronical votaries, who only half understood their idol, and loved him for a gloom that in their own case was nothing but a graceful veil for selfishness and mental indolence, saw and felt only the melancholy conclusion, and had not travelled a yard in the burning path that led to it. They hugged Conrad's haughty misery, but they would have trembled at the thought of Conrad's perilous expedition. They were proud despondent Laras after their manner, 'lords of themselves, that heritage of woe,' but the heritage would have been still more unbearable, if it had involved Lara's bodily danger.

This shallowness has no part in Byron himself. His weariness was a genuine outcome of the influence of the time upon a character consumed by passion. His lot was cast among spent forces, and, while it is no hyperbole to say that he was himself the most enormous force of his time, he was only half conscious of this, if indeed he did not always inwardly shrink from crediting his own power and strength, as

so many strong men habitually do, in spite of noisy and perpetual self-assertion. Conceit and presumption have not been any more fatal to the world, than the waste which comes of great men failing in their hearts to recognise how great they are. Many a man whose affectations and assumptions are a proverb, has lost the magnificent virtue of simplicity, for no other reason than that he needed courage to take his own measure, and so finally confirm to himself the reality of his pretensions. With Byron, as with some of his prototypes among the men of action in France and elsewhere, theatrical ostentation, excessive self-consciousness, extravagant claims, cannot hide from us that their power was secretly drained by an ever-present distrust of their own aims, their own methods, even of the very results that they seem to have achieved.

This diffidence was an inseparable consequence of the vast predominance of exalted passion over reflection, which is one of the revolutionary marks. Byron was fundamentally and substantially, as has been already said, one of the most rational of men. Hence when the passionate fit grew cold, as it always does in temperaments so mixed, he wanted for perfect strength a justification in thought. There are men whose being is so universally possessed by phantasies, that they never feel this necessity of reconciling the visions of excited emotion with the ideas of ordered reason. Byron was more vigorously constituted, and his susceptibility to the necessity of this reconciliation

combined with his inability to achieve it, to produce that cynicism which the simple charity of vulgar opinion attributes to the possession of him by unclean devils. It was his refuge, as it sometimes is with smaller men, from the disquieting confusion which was caused by the disproportion between his visions and aspirations, and his intellectual means for satisfying himself seriously as to their true relations and substantive value. Only the man arrives at practical strength who is convinced, whether rightly or wrongly, that he knows all about his own ideas that needs to be known. Byron never did thus know himself, either morally or intellectually. The higher part of him was consciously dragged down by the degrading reminiscence of the brutishness of his youth and its connections and associations; they hung like miasma over his spirit. He could not rise to that sublimest height of moral fervour, when a man intrepidly chases from his memory past evil done, suppresses the recollection of old corruptions, declares that he no longer belongs to them nor they to him, and is not frightened by the past from a firm and lofty respect for present dignity and worth. It is a good thing thus to overthrow the tyranny of the memory, and to cast out the body of our dead selves. That Byron never attained this good, though he was not unlikely to have done so if he had lived longer, does not prove that he was too gross to feel its need, but it explains a moral weakness which has left a strange and touching mark on some of his later works.

So in the intellectual order, he knew too much in one sense, and in another too little. The strong man is not conscious of gaps and cataclysms in the structure of his belief, or else he would in so far instantly cease to be strong. One living, as Byron emphatically did, in the truly modern atmosphere, was bound by all the conditions of the atmosphere to have mastered what we may call the natural history of his own ideas and convictions; to know something of their position towards fact and outer circumstance and possibility; above all to have some trusty standard for testing their value, and assuring himself that they do really cover the field which he takes them to cover. People with a faith and people living in frenzy are equally under this law; but they take the completeness and coherency of their doctrine for granted. Byron was not the prey of habitual frenzy, and he was without a faith. That is to say, he had no firm basis for his conceptions, and he was aware that he had none. The same unrest which drove men of that epoch to Nature, haunted them to the end, because they had no systematic conception of her working and of human relations with her. In a word, there was no science. Byron was a warm admirer of the genius and art of Goethe, yet he never found out the central secret of Goethe's greatness, his luminous and coherent positivity. This is the crowning glory of the modern spirit, and it was the lack of this which went so far to neutralise Byron's hold of the other chief characteristics of that spirit, its freedom and spaciousness, its

humaneness and wide sociality, its versatility and many-sidedness and passionate feeling for the great natural forces.

This positivity is the cardinal condition of strength for times when theology lies in decay, and the abstractions which gradually replaced the older gods have in their turn ceased to satisfy the intelligence and mould the will. All competent persons agree that it is the first condition of the attainment of scientific truth. Nobody denies that men of action find in it the first law of successful achievement in the material order. Its varied but always superlative power in the region of æsthetics is only an object of recent recognition, though great work enough has been done in past ages by men whose recognition was informal and inexpress. It is plain that, in the different classes of æsthetic manifestation, there will be differences in objective shape and colour, corresponding to the varied limits and conditions of the matter with which the special art has to deal; but the critic may expect to find in all a profound unity of subjective impression, and that, the impression of a self-sustaining order and a self-sufficing harmony among all those faculties and parts and energies of universal life, which come within the idealising range of art. In other words, the characteristically modern inspiration is the inspiration of law. The regulated play of forces shows itself as fit to stir those profound emotional impulses which wake the artistic soul, as ever did the gracious or terrible

gods of antique or middle times. There are glories in Turner's idealisation of the energies of matter, which are at least as nobly imaginative and elevated, in spite of the conspicuous absence of the human element in them, as the highest products of the artists who believed that their work was for the service and honour of a deity.

It is as mistaken to suppose that this conviction of the supremacy of a cold and self-sustained order in the universe is fatal to emotional expansion, as it would be to suppose it fatal to intellectual curiosity. Experience has shown in the scientific sphere, that the gradual withdrawal of natural operations from the grasp of the imaginary volitions of imaginary beings has not tamed, but greatly stimulated and fertilised scientific curiosity as to the conditions of these operations. Why should it be otherwise in the æsthetic sphere? Why should all that part of our mental composition which responds to the beautiful and imaginative expression of real truths, be at once inflamed and satisfied by the thought that our whole lives, and all the movements of the universe, are the objects of the inexplicable caprice of Makers who are also Destroyers, and yet grow cold, apathetic, and unproductive, in the shadow of the belief that we can only know ourselves as part of the stupendous and inexorable succession of phenomenal conditions, moving according to laws that may be formulated positively, but not interpreted morally, to new destinies that are eternally unfathomable? Why should this

conception of a coherent order, free from the arbitrary and presumptuous stamp of certain final causes, be less favourable, either to the ethical or the æsthetic side of human nature, than the older conception of the regulation of the course of the great series by a multitude of intrinsically meaningless and purposeless volitions? The alertness of our sensations for all sources of outer beauty remains unimpaired. The old and lovely attitude of devout service does not pass away to leave vacancy, but is transformed into a yet more devout obligation and service towards creatures that have only their own fellowship and mutual ministry to lean upon; and if we miss something of the ancient solace of special and personal protection, the loss is not unworthily made good by the growth of an imperial sense of participation in the common movement and equal destination of eternal forces.

To have a mind penetrated with this spiritual persuasion, is to be in full possession of the highest strength that man can attain. It springs from a scientific and rounded interpretation of the facts of life, and is in a harmony, which freshly found truths only make more ample and elaborate, with all the conclusions of the intellect in every order. The active energies are not paralysed by the possibilities of enfeebling doubt, nor the reason drawn down and stultified by apprehension lest its methods should discredit a document, or its inferences clash with a dogma, or its light flash unseasonably on a mystery. There is

none of the baleful distortion of hate, because evil and wrong-doing and darkness are acknowledged to be effects of causes, sums of conditions, terms in a series; they are to be brought to their end, or weakened and narrowed, by right action and endeavour, and this endeavour does not stagnate in antipathy, but concentrates itself in transfixing a cause. In no other condition of the spirit than this, in which firm acquiescence mingles with valorous effort, can a man be so sure of raising a calm gaze and an enduring brow to the cruelty of circumstance. The last appalling stroke of annihilation itself is measured with purest fortitude by one, whose religious contemplation dwells most habitually upon the sovereignty of obdurate laws in the vast revolving circle of physical forces, on the one hand, and, on the other, upon that moral order which the vision and pity of good men for their fellows, guiding the spontaneous energy of all men in strife with circumstance, have raised into a structure sublimer and more amazing than all the majesty of outer nature.

In Byron's time the pretensions of the two possible answers to the great and eternally open questions of God, Immortality, and the like, were independent of that powerful host of inferences and analogies which the advance of physical discovery, and the establishment of a historical order, have since then brought into men's minds. The direct aggressions of old are for the most part abandoned, because it is felt that no fiercest polemical cannonading can drive away the

impalpable darkness of error, but only the slow and silent presence of the dawning truth. *Cain* remains, a stern and lofty statement of the case against that theological tradition which so outrages, where it has not already too deeply depraved, the conscience of civilised man. Yet every one who is competent to judge, must feel how infinitely more free the mind of the poet would have been, if besides this just and holy rage, most laudable in its kind, his intellectual equipment had been ample enough and precise enough to have taught him, that all the conceptions that races of men have ever held, either about themselves or their deities, have had a source in the permanently useful instincts of human nature, are capable of explanation, and of a historical justification ; that is to say, of the kind of justification which is, in itself and of its own force, the most instant destruction to what has grown to be an anachronism.

Byron's curiously marked predilection for dramatic composition, not merely for dramatic poems, as *Manfred* or *Cain*, but for genuine plays, as *Marino Faliero*, *Werner*, the *Two Foscari*, was the only sign of his approach to the really positive spirit. Dramatic art, in its purest modern conception, is genuinely positive ; that is, it is the presentation of action, character, and motive in a self-sufficing and self-evolving order. There are no final causes, and the first moving elements are taken for granted to begin with. The dramatist creates, but it is the climax of his work to appear to stand absolutely apart and unseen, while

the play unfolds itself to the spectator, just as the greater drama of physical phenomena unfolds itself to the scientific observer, or as the order of recorded history extends in natural process under the eye of the political philosopher. Partly, no doubt, the attraction which dramatic form had for Byron is to be explained by that revolutionary thirst for action, of which we have already spoken; but partly also it may well have been due to Byron's rudimentary and unsuspected affinity with the more constructive and scientific side of the modern spirit.

His idea of Nature, of which something has been already said, pointed in the same direction; for, although he made an abstraction and a goddess of her, and was in so far out of the right modern way of thinking about these outer forces, it is to be remembered, that, while this dominant conception of Nature as introduced by Rousseau and others into politics was most mischievous and destructive, its place and worth in poetry are very different; because here in the region of the imagination it had the effect, without any pernicious practical consequences, of giving shape and proportion to that great idea of *ensemble* throughout the visible universe, which may be called the beginning and fountain of right knowledge. The conception of the relationship of the different parts and members of the vast cosmos was not accessible to Byron, as it is to a later generation, but his constant appeal in season and out of season to all the life and movement that surrounds man, implied and promoted

the widest extension of consciousness of the wholeness and community of natural processes.

There was one very manifest evil consequence of the hold which this idea in its cruder shape gained over Byron and his admirers. The vastness of the material universe, as they conceived and half adored it, entirely overshadowed the principle of moral duty and social obligation. The domestic sentiment, for example, almost disappears in those works which made Byron most popular, or else it only appears, to be banished with reproach. This is quite in accordance with the revolutionary spirit, which was in one of its most fundamental aspects a revolt on behalf of unconditioned individual rights, and against the family. If we accept what seems to be the fatal law of progress, that excess on one side is only moderated by a nearly corresponding excess of an opposite kind, the Byronic dissolution of domestic feeling was not entirely without justification. There is probably no uglier growth of time than that mean and poor form of domesticity, which has always been too apt to fascinate the English imagination, ever since the last great effort of the Rebellion, and which rose to the climax of its popularity when George III. won all hearts by living like a farmer. Instead of the fierce light beating about a throne, it played lambently upon a sty. And the nation who admired, imitated. When the Regent came, and with him that coarse profligacy which has alternated with cloudy insipidity in the annals of the

line, the honest part of the world, out of antipathy to the son, was driven even further into domestic sentimentality of a greasy kind, than it had gone from affection for the sire.

Byron helped to clear the air of this. His fire, his lofty spaciousness of outlook, his spirited interest in great national causes, his romance, and the passion both of his animosity and his sympathy, acted for a while like an electric current, and every one within his influence became ashamed to barter the large heritage of manhood, with its many realms and illimitable interests, for the sordid ease of the hearth and the good word of the unworthy. He fills men with thoughts that shake down the unlovely temple of comfort. This was good, to force whoever was not already too far sunk into the mire, high up to the larger atmosphere, whence they could see how minute an atom is man, how infinite and blind and pitiless the might that encompasses his little life. Many feeble spirits ran back homewards from the horrid solitudes and abysses of *Manfred*, and the moral terrors of *Cain*, and even the despair of *Harold*, and, burying themselves in warm domestic places, were comforted by the familiar restoratives and appliances. Firmer souls were not only exhilarated, but intoxicated by the potent and unaccustomed air. They went too far. They made war on the family, and the idea of it. Everything human was mischievously dwarfed, and the difference between right and wrong, between gratification of appetite and its control for virtue's

sake, between the acceptance and the evasion of clear obligation, all became invisible or of no account in the new light. That constancy and permanence, of which the family is the type, and which is the first condition alike of the stability and progress of society, was obliterated from thought. As if the wonders that have been wrought by this regulated constancy of the feeling of man for man in transforming human life were not far more transcendently exalting than the contemplation of those glories of brute nature, which are barbaric in comparison.

It would be unjust not to admit that there are abundant passages in his poems of too manifest depth and sincerity of feeling, for us to suppose that Byron himself was dead to the beauty of domestic sentiment. The united tenderness and dignity of Faliero's words to Angiolina, before he goes to the meeting of the conspirators, would, if there were nothing else, be enough to show how rightly in his better moods the poet appreciated the conditions of the family. Unfortunately the better moods were not fixed, and we had *Don Juan*, where the wit and colour and power served to make an anti-social and licentious sentiment attractive to puny creatures, who were thankful to have their lasciviousness so gaily adorned. As for Great Britain, she deserved *Don Juan*. A nation, whose disrespect for all ideas and aspirations that cannot be supported by a text, nor circulated by a religious tract society, was systematic, and where consequently the understanding is least protected

against sensual sophisms, received no more than a just chastisement in 'the literature of Satan.' Here again, in the licence of this literature, we see the finger of the Revolution, and of that egoism which makes the passions of the individual his own law. Let us condemn and pass on, homily undelivered. If Byron injured the domestic idea on this side, let us not fail to observe how vastly he elevated it on others. and how, above all, he pointed to the idea above and beyond it, in whose light only can that be worthy, the idea of a country and a public cause. A man may be sure that the comfort of the hearth has usurped too high a place, when he can read without response the lines declaring that domestic ties must yield in 'those who are called to the highest destinies, which purify corrupted commonwealths.'

We must forget all feelings save the one—
We must resign all passions save our purpose—
We must behold no object save our country—
And only look on death as beautiful,
So that the sacrifice ascend to heaven
And draw down freedom on her evermore.
Calendaro. But if we fail——
I. Bertuccio. They never fail who die
In a great cause: the block may soak their gore;
Their heads may sodden in the sun; their limbs
Be strung to city gates and castle walls—
But still their spirit walks abroad. Though years
Elapse, and others share as dark a doom,
They but augment the deep and sweeping thoughts
Which overpower all others, and conduct
The world at last to freedom. What were we
If Brutus had not lived? He died in giving

> Rome liberty, but left a deathless lesson—
> A name which is a virtue, and a soul
> Which multiplies itself throughout all time,
> When wicked men wax mighty, and a state
> Turns servile.

And the man who wrote this was worthy to play an even nobler part than the one he had thus nobly described; for it was not many years after, that Byron left all and laid down his life for the emancipation of a strange land, and 'Greece and Italy wept for his death, as it had been that of the noblest of their own sons.' Detractors have done their best to pare away the merit of this act of self-renunciation by attributing it to despair. That contemporaries of their own humour had done their best to make his life a load to him is true, yet to this talk of despair we may reply in the poet's own words:

> When we know
> All that can come, and how to meet it, our
> Resolves, if firm, may merit a more noble
> Word than this, to give it utterance.

There was an estimate of the value and purpose of a human life, which our Age of Comfort may fruitfully ponder.

To fix upon violent will and incessant craving for movement as the mark of a poet, whose contemporaries adored him for what they took to be the musing sweetness of his melancholy, may seem a critical perversity. There is, however, a momentous difference between that melancholy, which is as the mere shadow projected by a man's spiritual form, and that other

melancholy, which itself is the reality and substance of a character; between the soul to whom dejection brings graceful relief after labour and effort, and the soul which by irresistible habit and constitution dwells ever in Golgotha. This deep and penetrating subjective melancholy had no possession of Byron. His character was essentially objective, stimulated by outward circumstance, moving to outward harmonies, seeking colour and image and purpose from without. Hence there is inevitably a certain liveliness and animation, even when he is in the depths. We feel that we are watching clouds sweep majestically across the sky, and, even when they are darkest, blue interspaces are not far off. Contrast the moodiest parts of *Childe Harold* or of *Cain* with Novalis's *Night Hymns*. Byron's gloom is a mere elegance in comparison. The one pipes to us with a graceful despondency on the edge of the gulf, while the other carries us actually down into the black profound, with no rebellious cry, nor shriek of woe, but sombrely awaiting the deliverance of death, with soul absorbed and consumed by weariness. Let the reader mark the note of mourning struck in the opening stanzas, for instance, of Novalis's *Longing after Death*, their simplicity, homeliness, transparent sincerity, and then turn to any of the familiar passages where Byron meditates on the good things which the end brings to men. How artificial he seems, and unseasonably ornate, and how conscious of his public. In the first, we sit sadly on the ground in some

veritable Place of a Skull; in the second, we assist at tragical distress after the manner of the Italian opera. We should be disposed to call the first a peculiarly German quality, until we remember Pascal. With Novalis, or with Pascal, as with all those whom character, or the outer fates, or the two together, have drawn to dwell in the valley of the shadow, gloom and despondency are the very stuff of their thoughts. Material energy could have done nothing for them. Their nerves and sinews were too nearly cut asunder. To know the quality of Byron's melancholy, and to recognise how little it was of the essence of his character, we have only to consider how far removed he was from this condition. In other words, in spite of morbid manifestations of one sort and another, he always preserved a salutary and vivid sympathy for action, and a marked capacity for it.

It was the same impetuous and indomitable spirit of effort which moved Byron to his last heroic exploit, that made the poetry inspired by it so powerful in Europe, from the deadly days of the Holy Alliance onwards. Cynical and misanthropical as he has been called, as though that were his sum and substance, he yet never ceased to glorify human freedom, in tones that stirred the hearts of men and quickened their hope and upheld their daring, as with the voice of some heavenly trumpet. You may, if you choose, find the splendour of the stanzas in the Fourth Canto on the Bourbon restoration, on Cromwell, and Wash-

ington, a theatrical splendour. But for all that, they touched the noblest parts of men. They are alive with an exalted and magnanimous generosity, the one high virtue which can never fail to touch a multitude. Subtlety may miss them, graces may miss them, and reason may fly over their heads, but the words of a generous humanity on the lips of poet or chief have never failed to kindle divine music in their breasts. The critic may censure, and culture may wave a disdainful hand. As has been said, all such words 'are open to criticism, and they are all above it.' The magic still works. A mysterious and potent word from the gods has gone abroad over the face of the earth.

This larger influence was not impaired by Byron's ethical poverty. The latter was an inevitable consequence of his defective discipline. The triteness of his moral climax is occasionally startling. When Sardanapalus, for instance, sees Zarina torn from him, and is stricken with profound anguish at the pain with which he has filled her life, he winds up with such a platitude as this:

> To what gulfs
> A single deviation from the track
> Of human duties leaves even those who claim
> The homage of mankind as their born due!

The baldest writer of hymns might work up passion enough for a consummation like this. Once more, Byron was insufficiently furnished with positive intellectual ideas, and for want of these his most exalted

words were constantly left sterile of definite and pointed outcome.

Byron's passionate feeling for mankind included the long succession of generations, that stretch back into the past and lie far on in the misty distances of the future. No poet has had a more sublime sense of the infinite melancholy of history; indeed, we hardly feel how great a poet Byron was, until we have read him at Venice, at Florence, and above all in that overpowering scene where the 'lone mother of dead empires' broods like a mysterious haunting spirit among the columns and arches and wrecked fabrics of Rome. No one has expressed with such amplitude the sentiment that in a hundred sacred spots of the earth has

> Fill'd up
> As 'twere, anew, the gaps of centuries;
> Leaving that beautiful which still was so,
> And making that which was not; till the place
> Became religious, and the heart ran o'er
> With silent worship of the great of old—
> The dead, but sceptred sovereigns, who still rule
> Our spirits from their urns.

Only he stands aright, who from his little point of present possession ever meditates on the far-reaching lines, which pass through his point from one interminable star-light distance to another. Neither the stoic pagan, nor the disciple of the creed which has some of the peculiar weakness of stoicism and not all its peculiar strength, could find Manfred's latest word untrue to himself:

> The mind, which is immortal, makes itself
> Requital for its good or evil thoughts—
> Is its own origin of ill and end,
> And its own place and time: its innate sense,
> When stripped of this mortality, derives
> No colour from the fleeting things without:
> But is absorbed in sufferance of joy,
> Born from the knowledge of its own desert.

It is only when a man subordinates this absorption in individual sufferance and joy to the thought that his life is a trust for humanity, that he is sure of making it anything other than 'rain fallen on the sand.' In the last great episode of his own career Byron was as lofty as the noblest side of his creed. The historic feeling for the unseen benefactors of old time was matched by vehemence of sympathy with the struggles for liberation of his own day. And for this, history will not forget him. Though he may have no place in our own Minster, he assuredly belongs to the band of far-shining men, of whom Pericles declared the whole world to be the tomb.

MACAULAY.

'AFTER glancing my eye over the design and order of a new book,' says Gibbon, 'I suspended the perusal till I had finished the task of self-examination, till I had revolved in a solitary walk all that I knew or believed or had thought on the subject of the whole work or of some particular chapter; I was then qualified to discern how much the author added to my original stock; and if I was sometimes satisfied by the agreement, I was sometimes warned by the opposition of our ideas.' It is also told of Strafford that before reading any book for the first time, he would call for a sheet of paper, and then proceed to write down upon it some sketch of the ideas that he already had upon the subject of the book, and of the questions that he expected to find answered. No one who has been at the pains to try the experiment, will doubt the usefulness of this practice: it gives to our acquisitions from books clearness and reality, a right place and an independent shape. At this moment we are all looking for the biography of an illustrious man of letters, written by a near kinsman, who is himself naturally endowed with keen literary interests, and

who has invigorated his academic cultivation by practical engagement in considerable affairs of public business. Before taking up Mr. Trevelyan's two volumes, it is perhaps worth while, on Strafford's plan, to ask ourselves shortly what kind of significance or value belongs to Lord Macaulay's achievements, and to what place he has a claim among the forces of English literature. It is seventeen years since he died, and those of us who never knew him nor ever saw him, may now think about his work with that perfect detachment which is impossible in the case of actual contemporaries.[1]

That Macaulay comes in the very front rank in the mind of the ordinary bookbuyer of our day is quite certain. It is an amusement with some people to put an imaginary case of banishment to a desert

[1] Since the following piece was written, Mr. Trevelyan's biography of Lord Macaulay has appeared, and has enjoyed the great popularity to which its careful execution, its brightness of style, its good taste, its sound judgment, so richly entitle it. If Mr. Trevelyan's course in politics were not so useful as it is, one might be tempted to regret that he had not chosen literature for the main field of his career. The portrait which he draws of Lord Macaulay is so irresistibly attractive in many ways, that a critic may be glad to have delivered his soul before his judgment was subject to a dangerous bias, by the picture of Macaulay's personal character — its domestic amiability, its benevolence to unlucky followers of letters, its manliness, its high public spirit and generous patriotism. On reading my criticism over again, I am well pleased to find that not an epithet needs to be altered,—so independent is opinion as to this strong man's work, of our esteem for his loyal and upright character.

island, with the privilege of choosing the works of one author, and no more than one, to furnish literary companionship and refreshment for the rest of a life-time. Whom would one select for this momentous post? Clearly the author must be voluminous, for days on desert islands are many and long; he must be varied in his moods, his topics, and his interests; he must have a great deal to say, and must have a power of saying it that shall arrest a depressed and dolorous spirit. Englishmen, of course, would with mechanical unanimity call for Shakespeare; Germans could hardly hesitate about Goethe; and a sensible Frenchman would pack up the ninety volumes of Voltaire. It would be at least as interesting to know the object of a second choice, supposing the tyrant in his clemency to give us two authors. In the case of Englishmen there is some evidence as to a popular preference. A recent traveller in Australia informs us that the three books which he found on every squatter's shelf, and which at last he knew before he crossed the threshold that he should be sure to find, were Shakespeare, the Bible, and Macaulay's Essays. This is only an illustration of a feeling about Macaulay that has been almost universal among the English-speaking peoples.

We may safely say that no man obtains and keeps for a great many years such a position as this, unless he is possessed of some very extraordinary qualities, or else of common qualities in a very uncommon and extraordinary degree. The world, says Goethe, is

more willing to endure the Incongruous than to be patient under the Insignificant. Even those who set least value on what Macaulay does for his readers, may still feel bound to distinguish the elements that have given him his vast popularity. The inquiry is not a piece of merely literary criticism, for it is impossible that the work of so imposing a writer should have passed through the hands of every man and woman of his time who has even the humblest pretensions to cultivation, without leaving a very decided mark on their habits both of thought and expression. As a plain matter of observation, it is impossible to take up a newspaper or a review, for instance, without perceiving Macaulay's influence both in the style and the temper of modern journalism, and journalism in its turn acts upon the style and temper of its enormous uncounted public. The man who now succeeds in catching the ear of the writers of leading articles, is in the position that used to be held by the head of some great theological school, whence disciples swarmed forth to reproduce in ten thousand pulpits the arguments, the opinions, the images, the tricks, the postures, and the mannerisms of a single master.

Two men of very different kinds have thoroughly impressed the journalists of our time, Macaulay and Mr. Mill. Mr. Carlyle we do not add to them; he is, as the Germans call Jean Paul, *der Einzige*. And he is a poet, while the other two are in their degrees serious and argumentative writers, dealing in different

ways with the great topics that constitute the matter and business of daily discussion. They are both of them practical enough to interest men handling real affairs, and yet they are general or theoretical enough to supply such men with the large and ready commonplaces which are so useful to a profession that has to produce literary graces and philosophical decorations at an hour's notice. It might perhaps be said of these two distinguished men that our public writers owe most of their virtues to the one, and most of their vices to the other. If Mill taught some of them to reason, Macaulay tempted more of them to declaim: if Mill set an example of patience, tolerance, and fair examination of hostile opinions, Macaulay did much to encourage oracular arrogance, and a rather too thrasonical complacency; if Mill sowed ideas of the great economic, political, and moral bearings of the forces of society, Macaulay trained a taste for superficial particularities, trivial circumstantialities of local colour, and all the paraphernalia of the pseudo-picturesque.

Of course nothing so obviously untrue is meant as that this is an account of Macaulay's own quality. What is empty pretension in the leading article, was often a warranted self-assertion in Macaulay; what in it is little more than testiness, is in him often a generous indignation. What became and still remain in those who have made him their model, substantive and organic vices, the foundation of literary character and intellectual temper, were in him the incidental

defects of a vigorous genius. And we have to take a man of his power and vigour with all his drawbacks, for the one are wrapped up in the other. Charles Fox used to apply to Burke a passage that Quintilian wrote about Ovid. 'Si animi sui affectibus temperare quam indulgere maluisset,' quoted Fox, 'quid vir iste præstare non potuerit!' But this is really not at all certain either of Ovid, or Burke, or any one else. It suits moralists to tell us that excellence lies in the happy mean and nice balance of our faculties and impulses, and perhaps in so far as our own contentment and an easy passage through life are involved, what they tell us is true. But for making a mark in the world, for rising to supremacy in art or thought or affairs—whatever those aims may be worth—a man possibly does better to indulge, rather than to chide or grudge, his genius, and to pay the penalties for his weakness, rather than run any risk of mutilating those strong faculties of which they happen to be an inseparable accident. Versatility is not a universal gift among the able men of the world; not many of them have so many gifts of the spirit, as to be free to choose by what pass they will climb 'the steep where Fame's proud temple shines afar.' If Macaulay had applied himself to the cultivation of a balanced judgment, of tempered phrases, and of relative propositions, he would probably have sunk into an impotent tameness. A great pugilist has sometimes been converted from the error of his ways, and been led zealously to cherish gospel graces, but the hero's discourses have seldom

had the notes of unction and edification. Macaulay, divested of all the exorbitancies of his spirit and his style, would have been a Samson shorn of the locks of his strength.

Although, however, a writer of marked quality may do well to let his genius develop its spontaneous forces without too assiduous or vigilant repression, trusting to other writers of equal strength in other directions, and to the general fitness of things and operation of time, to redress the balance, still it is the task of criticism in counting up the contributions of one of these strong men to examine the mischiefs no less than the benefits incident to their work. There is no puny carping nor cavilling in the process. It is because such men are strong that they are able to do harm; they may injure the taste and judgment of a whole generation, just because they are never mediocre. That is implied in strength. Macaulay is not to be measured now merely as if he were the author of a new book. His influence has been a distinct literary force, and in an age of reading, this is to be a distinct force in deciding the temper, the process, the breadth, of men's opinions, no less than the manner of expressing them. It is no new observation that the influence of an author becomes in time something apart from his books: a certain generalised or abstract personality impresses itself on our minds, long after we have forgotten the details of his opinions, the arguments by which he enforced them, and even, what are usually the last to escape

us, the images by which he illustrated them. Phrases and sentences are a mask: but we detect the features of the man behind the mask. This personality of a favourite author is a real and powerful agency. Unconsciously we are infected with his humours; we apply his methods; we find ourselves copying the rhythm and measure of his periods; we wonder how he would have acted, or thought, or spoken in our circumstances. Usually a strong writer leaves a special mark in some particular region of mental activity: the final product of him is to fix some persistent religious mood, or some decisive intellectual bias, or else some trick of the tongue. Now Macaulay has contributed no philosophic ideas to the speculative stock, nor has he developed any one great historic or social truth. His work is always full of a high spirit of manliness, probity, and honour; but he is not of that small band to whom we may apply Mackintosh's thrice and four times enviable panegyric on the eloquence of Dugald Stewart, that its peculiar glory consisted in having 'breathed the love of virtue into whole generations of pupils.' He has painted many striking pictures, and imparted a certain reality to our conception of many great scenes of the past. He did good service in banishing once for all those sentimental Jacobite leanings and prejudices which had been kept alive by the sophistry of the most popular of historians, and the imagination of the most popular of romance writers. But where he set his stamp has been upon style; style in its widest sense, not merely on the

grammar and mechanism of writing, but on what De Quincey described as its *organology;* style, that is to say, in its relation to ideas and feelings, its commerce with thought, and its reaction on what one may call the temper or conscience of the intellect.

Let no man suppose that it matters little whether the most universally popular of the serious authors of a generation—and Macaulay was nothing less than this—affects *style coupé* or *style soutenu.* The critic of style is not the dancing-master, declaiming on the deep ineffable things that lie in a minuet. He is not the virtuoso of supines and gerundives. The morality of style goes deeper 'than dull fools suppose.' When Comte took pains to prevent any sentence from exceeding two lines of his manuscript or five of print; to restrict every paragraph to seven sentences; to exclude every hiatus between two sentences, or even between two paragraphs; and never to reproduce any word, except the auxiliary monosyllables, in two consecutive sentences; he justified his literary solicitude by insisting on the wholesomeness alike to heart and intelligence of submission to artificial institutions. He felt, after he had once mastered the habit of the new yoke, that it became the source of continual and unforeseeable improvements even in thought, and he perceived that the reason why verse is a higher kind of literary perfection than prose, is that verse imposes a greater number of rigorous forms. We may add that verse itself is perfected, in the hands of men of poetic genius, in proportion to the severity of this

mechanical regulation. Where Pope or Racine had one rule of metre, Victor Hugo has twenty, and he observes them as rigorously as an algebraist or an astronomer observes the rules of calculation or demonstration. One, then, who touches the style of a generation acquires no trifling authority over its thought and temper, as well as over the length of its sentences.

The first and most obvious secret of Macaulay's place on popular bookshelves is that he has a true genius for narration, and narration will always in the eyes, not only of our squatters in the Australian bush, but of the many all over the world, stand first among literary gifts. The common run of plain men, as has been noticed since the beginning of the world, are as eager as children for a story, and like children they will embrace the man who will tell them a story, with abundance of details and plenty of colour, and a realistic assurance that it is no mere make-believe. Macaulay never stops to brood over an incident or a character, with an inner eye intent on penetrating to the lowest depth of motive and cause, to the furthest complexity of impulse, calculation, and subtle incentive. The spirit of analysis is not in him, and the divine spirit of meditation is not in him. His whole mind runs in action and movement; it busies itself with eager interest in all objective particulars. He is seized by the external and the superficial, and revels in every detail that appeals to the five senses. 'The

brilliant Macaulay,' said Emerson, with slight exaggeration, 'who expresses the tone of the English governing classes of the day, explicitly teaches that *good* means good to eat, good to wear, material commodity.' So ready a faculty of exultation in the exceeding great glories of taste and touch, of loud sound and glittering spectacle, is a gift of the utmost service to the narrator who craves immense audiences. Let it be said that if Macaulay exults in the details that go to our five senses, his sensuousness is always clean, manly, and fit for honest daylight and the summer sun. There is none of that curious odour of autumnal decay that clings to the passion of a more modern school for colour and flavour and the enumerated treasures of subtle indulgence.

Mere picturesqueness, however, is a minor qualification compared with another quality which everybody assumes himself to have, but which is in reality extremely uncommon; the quality, I mean, of telling a tale directly and in straightforward order. In speaking of Hallam, Macaulay complained that Gibbon had brought into fashion an unpleasant trick of telling a story by implication and allusion. This provoking obliquity has certainly increased rather than declined since Hallam's day. Mr. Froude, it is true, whatever may be his shortcomings on the side of sound moral and political judgment, has admirable gifts in the way of straightforward narration, and Mr. Freeman, when he does not press too hotly after emphasis, and abstains from overloading his account with super

abundance of detail, is usually excellent in the way of direct description. Still, it is not merely because these two writers are alive and Macaulay is not, that most people would say of him that he is unequalled in our time in his mastery of the art of letting us know in an express and unmistakable way exactly what it was that happened; though it is quite true that in many portions of his too elaborated History of William the Third he describes a large number of events about which, I think, no sensible man can in in the least care either how they happened, or whether indeed they happened at all or not.

Another reason why people have sought Macaulay is, that he has in one way or another something to tell them about many of the most striking personages and interesting events in the history of mankind. And he does really tell them something. If any one will be at the trouble to count up the number of those names that belong to the world and time, about which Macaulay has found not merely something, but something definite and pointed to say, he will be astonished to see how large a portion of the wide historic realm is traversed in that ample flight of reference, allusion, and illustration, and what unsparing copiousness of knowledge gives substance, meaning, and attraction to that resplendent blaze of rhetoric.

Macaulay came upon the world of letters just as the middle classes were expanding into enormous prosperity, were vastly increasing in numbers, and were becoming more alive than they had ever been

before to literary interests. His Essays are as good as a library: they make an incomparable manual and vade-mecum for a busy uneducated man, who has curiosity and enlightenment enough to wish to know a little about the great lives and great thoughts, the shining words and many-coloured complexities of action, that have marked the journey of man through the ages. Macaulay had an intimate acquaintance both with the imaginative literature and the history of Greece and Rome, with the literature and the history of modern Italy, of France, and of England. Whatever his special subject, he contrives to pour into it with singular dexterity a stream of rich, graphic, and telling illustrations from all these widely diversified sources. Figures from history, ancient and modern, sacred and secular; characters from plays and novels from Plautus down to Walter Scott and Jane Austen; images and similes from poets of every age and every nation, 'pastoral, pastoral-comical, historical-pastoral, tragical-historical;' shrewd thrusts from satirists, wise saws from sages, pleasantries caustic or pathetic from humorists; all these throng Macaulay's pages with the bustle and variety and animation of some glittering masque and cosmoramic revel of great books and heroical men. Hence, though Macaulay was in mental constitution one of the very least Shakesperean writers that ever lived, yet he has the Shakesperean quality of taking his reader through an immense gallery of interesting characters and striking situations. No writer can

now expect to attain the widest popularity as a man of letters unless he gives to the world *multa* as well as *multum*. Sainte-Beuve, the most eminent man of letters in France in our generation, wrote no less than twenty-seven volumes of his incomparable *Causeries*. Mr. Carlyle, the most eminent man of letters in England in our generation, has taught us that silence is golden in thirty volumes. Macaulay was not so exuberantly copious as these two illustrious writers, but he had the art of being as various without being so voluminous.

There has been a great deal of deliberate and systematic imitation of Macaulay's style, often by clever men who might well have trusted to their own resources. Its most conspicuous vices are very easy to imitate, but it is impossible for any one who is less familiar with literature than Macaulay was, to reproduce his style effectively, for the reason that it is before all else the style of great literary knowledge. Nor is that all. Macaulay's knowledge was not only very wide; it was both thoroughly accurate and instantly ready. For this stream of apt illustrations he was indebted to his extraordinary memory, and his rapid eye for contrasts and analogies. They come to the end of his pen as he writes; they are not laboriously hunted out in indexes, and then added by way of afterthought and extraneous interpolation. Hence quotations and references that in a writer even of equal knowledge, but with his wits less promptly about him, would seem mechanical and awkward, find

their place in a page of Macaulay as if by a delightful process of complete assimilation and spontaneous fusion.

We may be sure that no author could have achieved Macaulay's boundless popularity among his contemporaries, unless his work had abounded in what is substantially Commonplace. Addison puts fine writing in sentiments that are natural without being obvious, and this is a true account of the 'law' of the exquisite literature of the Queen Anne men. We may perhaps add to Addison's definition, that the great secret of the best kind of popularity is always the noble or imaginative handling of Commonplace. Shakespeare may at first seem an example to the contrary; and indeed is it not a standing marvel that the greatest writer of a nation that is distinguished among all nations for the pharisaism, puritanism, and unimaginative narrowness of its judgments on conduct and type of character, should be paramount over all writers for the breadth, maturity, fulness, subtlety, and infinite variousness of his conception of human life and nature? One possible answer to the perplexity is that the puritanism does not go below the surface in us, and that Englishmen are not really limited in their view by the too strait formulas that are supposed to contain their explanations of the moral universe. On this theory the popular appreciation of Shakespeare is the irrepressible response of the hearty inner man to a voice, in which he recognises the full note of

human nature, and those wonders of the world which are not dreamt of in his professed philosophy. A more obvious answer than this is that Shakespeare's popularity with the many is not due to those finer glimpses that are the very essence of all poetic delight to the few, but to his thousand other magnificent attractions, and above all, after his skill as a pure dramatist and master of scenic interest and situation, to the lofty or pathetic setting with which he vivifies, not the subtleties or refinements, but the commonest and most elementary traits of the commonest and most elementary human moods. The few with minds touched by nature or right cultivation to the finer issues, admire the supreme genius which takes some poor Italian tale, with its coarse plot and gross personages, and shooting it through with threads of variegated meditation, produces a masterpiece of penetrative reflection and high pensive suggestion as to the deepest things and most secret parts of the life of men. But to the general these finer threads are indiscernible. What touches them in the Shakesperean poetry, and most rightly touches them and us all, are topics eternally old, yet of eternal freshness, the perennial truisms of the grave and the bride-chamber, of shifting fortune, of the surprises of destiny, and the emptiness of the answered vow. This is the region in which the poet wins his widest if not his hardest triumphs, the region of the noble Commonplace.

A writer dealing with such matters as principally

occupied Macaulay, has not the privilege of resort to these great poetic inspirations. Yet history, too, has its generous commonplaces, its plausibilities of emotion, and no one has ever delighted more than Macaulay did, to appeal to the fine truisms that cluster round love of freedom and love of native land. The high rhetorical topics of liberty and patriotism are his readiest instruments for kindling a glowing reflection of these magnanimous passions in the breasts of his readers. That Englishman is hardly to be envied who can read without a glow such passages as that in the History, about Turenne being startled by the shout of stern exultation with which his English allies advanced to the combat, and expressing the delight of a true soldier when he learned that it was ever the fashion of Cromwell's pikemen to rejoice greatly when they beheld the enemy; while even the banished cavaliers felt an emotion of national pride when they saw a brigade of their countrymen, outnumbered by foes and abandoned by friends, drive before it in headlong rout the finest infantry of Spain, and force a passage into a counterscarp which had just been pronounced impregnable by the ablest of the marshals of France. Such prose as this is not less thrilling to a man who loves his country, than the spirited verse of the Lays of Ancient Rome. And the commonplaces of patriotism and freedom would never have been so powerful in Macaulay's hands, if they had not been inspired by a sincere and hearty faith in them in the soul of the

writer. His unanalytical turn of mind kept him free of any temptation to think of love of country as a prejudice, or a passion for freedom as an illusion. The cosmopolitan or international idea which such teachers as Cobden have tried to impress on our stubborn islanders, would have found in Macaulay not lukewarm or sceptical adherence, but point-blank opposition and denial. He believed as stoutly in the supremacy of Great Britain in the history of the good causes of Europe, as M. Thiers believes in the supremacy of France, or Mazzini believed in that of Italy. The thought of the prodigious industry, the inventiveness, the stout enterprise, the free government, the wise and equal laws, the noble literature, of this fortunate island and its majestic empire beyond the seas, and the discretion, valour, and tenacity by which all these great material and still greater intangible possessions had been first won, and then kept, against every hostile comer whether domestic or foreign, sent through Macaulay a thrill, like that which the thought of Paris and its heroisms moves in the great poet of France, or sight of the dear city of the Violet Crown moved in an Athenian of old. Thus habitually, with all sincerity of heart, to offer to one of the greater popular prepossessions the incense due to any other idol of superstition, sacred and of indisputable authority, and to let this adoration be seen shining in every page, is one of the keys that every man must find, who would make a quick and sure way into the temple of contemporary fame.

It is one of the first things to be said about Macaulay, that he was in exact accord with the common average sentiment of his day on every subject on which he spoke. His superiority was not of that highest kind which leads a man to march in thought on the outside margin of the crowd, watching them, sympathising with them, hoping for them, but apart. Macaulay was one of the middle-class crowd in his heart, and only rose above it by splendid attainments and extraordinary gifts of expression. He had none of that ambition which inflames some hardy men, to make new beliefs and new passions enter the minds of their neighbours; his ascendency is due to literary pomp, not to fecundity of spirit. No one has ever surpassed him in the art of combining resolute and ostentatious common sense of a slightly coarse sort in choosing his point of view, with so considerable an appearance of dignity and elevation in setting it forth and impressing it upon others. The elaborateness of his style is very likely to mislead people into imagining for him a corresponding elaborateness of thought and sentiment. On the contrary, Macaulay's mind was really very simple, strait, and with as few notes in its register, to borrow a phrase from the language of vocal compass, as there are few notes, though they are very loud, in the register of his written prose. When we look more closely into it, what at first wore the air of dignity and elevation, in truth rather disagreeably resembles the narrow assurance of a man who knows that he

has with him the great battalions of public opinion. We are always quite sure that if Macaulay had been an Athenian citizen towards the ninety-fifth Olympiad, he would have taken sides with Anytus and Meletus in the impeachment of Socrates. A popular author must, in a thorough-going way, take the accepted maxims for granted. He must suppress any whimsical fancy for applying the Socratic elenchus, or any other engine of criticism, scepticism, or verification, to those sentiments or current precepts of morals, which may in truth be very equivocal and may be much neglected in practice, but which the public opinion of his time requires to be treated in theory and in literature as if they had been cherished and held sacred *semper, ubique, et ab omnibus.*

This is just what Macaulay does, and it is commonly supposed to be no heavy fault in him or any other writer for the common public. Man cannot live by analysis alone, nor nourish himself on the secret delights of irony. And if Macaulay had only reflected the more generous of the prejudices of mankind, it would have been well enough. Burke, for instance, was a writer who revered the prejudices of a modern society as deeply as Macaulay did; he believed society to be founded on prejudices and held compact by them. Yet what size there is in Burke, what fine perspective, what momentum, what edification! It may be pleaded that there is the literature of edification, and there is the literature of knowledge, and that the qualities proper to the one cannot law-

fully be expected from the other, and would only be very much out of place if they should happen to be found there. But there are two answers to this. First, Macaulay in the course of his varied writings discusses all sorts of ethical and other matters, and is not simply a chronicler of party and intrigue, of dynasties and campaigns. Second, and more than this, even if he had never travelled beyond the composition of historical record, he could still have sown his pages, as does every truly great writer, no matter what his subject may be, with those significant images or far-reaching suggestions, which suddenly light up a whole range of distant thoughts and sympathies within us; which in an instant affect the sensibilities of men with a something new and unforeseen; and which awaken, if only for a passing moment, the faculty and response of the diviner mind. Tacitus does all this, and Burke does it, and that is why men who care nothing for Roman despots or for Jacobin despots, will still perpetually turn to those writers almost as if they were on the level of great poets or very excellent spiritual teachers.

One secret is that they, and all such men as they were, had that of which Macaulay can hardly have had the rudimentary germ, the faculty of deep abstract meditation and surrender to the fruitful 'leisures of the spirit.' We can picture Macaulay talking, or making a speech in the House of Commons, or buried in a book, or scouring his library for references, or covering his blue foolscap with dashing periods, or

accentuating his sentences and barbing his phrases; but can anybody think of him as meditating, as modestly pondering and wondering, as possessed for so much as ten minutes by that spirit of inwardness, which has never been wholly wanting in any of those kings and princes of literature, with whom it is good for men to sit in counsel? He seeks Truth, not as she should be sought, devoutly, tentatively, and with the air of one touching the hem of a sacred garment, but clutching her by the hair of the head and dragging her after him in a kind of boisterous triumph, a prisoner of war and not a goddess.

All this finds itself reflected, as the inner temper of a man always is reflected, in his style of written prose. The merits of Macaulay's prose are obvious enough. It naturally reproduces the good qualities of his understanding, its strength, manliness, and directness. That exultation in material goods and glories of which we have already spoken, makes his pages rich in colour, and gives them the effect of a sumptuous gala-suit. Certainly the brocade is too brand-new, and has none of the delicate charm that comes to such finery when it is a little faded. Again, nobody can have any excuse for not knowing exactly what it is that Macaulay means. We may assuredly say of his prose what Boileau says of his own poetry—'Et mon vers, bien ou mal, dit toujours quelque chose.' This is a prodigious merit, when we reflect with what fatal alacrity human language lends itself in the hands of so many performers upon the

pliant instrument, to all sorts of obscurity, ambiguity, disguise, and pretentious mystification. Scaliger is supposed to have remarked of the Basques and their desperate tongue: 'Tis said the Basques understand one another; for my part, I will never believe it.' The same pungent doubt might apply to loftier members of the hierarchy of speech than that forlorn dialect, but never to English as handled by Macaulay. He never wrote an obscure sentence in his life, and this may seem a small merit, until we remember of how few writers we could say the same.

Macaulay is of those who think prose as susceptible of polished and definite form as verse, and he was, we should suppose, of those also who hold the type and mould of all written language to be spoken language. There are more reasons for demurring to the soundness of the latter doctrine, than can conveniently be made to fill a digression here. For one thing, spoken language necessarily implies one or more listeners, whereas written language may often have to express meditative moods and trains of inward reflection that move through the mind without trace of external reference, and that would lose their special traits by the introduction of any suspicion that they were to be overheard. Again, even granting that all composition must be supposed to be meant, by the fact of its existence, to be addressed to a body of readers, it still remains to be shown that indirect address to the inner ear should follow the same method and rhythm as address directly through im-

pressions on the outer organ. The attitude of the recipient mind is different, and there is the symbolism of a new medium between it and the speaker. The writer, being cut off from all those effects which are producible by the physical intonations of the voice, has to find substitutes for them by other means, by subtler cadences, by a more varied modulation, by firmer notes, by more complex circuits, than suffice for the utmost perfection of spoken language, which has all the potent and manifold aids of personality. In writing, whether it be prose or verse, you are free to produce effects whose peculiarity one can only define vaguely, by saying that the senses have one part less in them than in any other of the forms and effects of art, and the imaginary voice one part more. But the question need not be laboured here, because there can be no dispute as to the quality of Macaulay's prose. Its measures are emphatically the measures of spoken deliverance. Those who have made the experiment, pronounce him to be one of the authors whose works are most admirably fitted for reading aloud. His firmness and directness of statement, his spiritedness, his art of selecting salient and highly coloured detail, and all his other merits as a narrator, keep the listener's attention, and make him the easiest of writers to follow.

Although, however, clearness, directness, and positiveness are master qualities and the indispensable foundations of all good style, yet does the matter plainly by no means end with them. And it is even

possible to have these virtues so unhappily proportioned and inauspiciously mixed with other turns and casts of mind, as to end in work with little grace or harmony or fine tracery about it, but only overweening purpose and vehement will. And it is overweeningness and self-confident will that are the chief notes of Macaulay's style. It has no benignity. Energy is doubtless a delightful quality, but then Macaulay's energy is perhaps energy without momentum, and he impresses us more by a strong volubility than by volume. It is the energy of interests and intuitions, which though they are profoundly sincere if ever they were sincere in any man, are yet in the relations which they comprehend, essentially superficial.

Still, trenchancy whether in speaker or writer is a most effective tone for a large public. It gives them confidence in their man, and prevents tediousness—except to those who reflect how delicate is the poise of truth, and what steeps and pits encompass the dealer in unqualified propositions. To such persons, a writer who is trenchant in every sentence of every page, who never lapses for a line into the contingent, who marches through the intricacies of things in a blaze of certainty, is not only a writer to be distrusted, but the owner of a doubtful and displeasing style. It is a great test of style to watch how an author disposes of the qualifications, limitations, and exceptions that clog the wings of his main proposition. The grave and conscientious men of the seventeenth century insisted on packing them all honestly along with the

main proposition itself, within the bounds of a single period. Burke arranges them in tolerably close order in the paragraph. Dr. Newmann, that winning writer, disperses them lightly over his page. Of Macaulay it is hardly unfair to say that he despatches all qualifications into outer space before he begins to write, or if he magnanimously admits one or two here and there, it is only to bring them the more imposingly to the same murderous end.

We have spoken of Macaulay's interests and intuitions wearing a certain air of superficiality; there is a feeling of the same kind about his attempts to be genial. It is not truly festive. There is no abandonment in it. It has no deep root in moral humour, and is merely a literary form, resembling nothing so much as the hard geniality of some clever college tutor of stiff manners, entertaining undergraduates at an official breakfast-party. This is not because his tone is bookish; on the contrary, his tone and level are distinctly those of the man of the world. But one always seems to find that neither a wide range of cultivation, nor familiar access to the best Whig circles, had quite removed the stiffness and self-conscious precision of the Clapham Sect. We would give much for a little more flexibility, and would welcome ever so slight a consciousness of infirmity. As has been said, the only people whom men cannot pardon are the perfect. Macaulay is like the military king who never suffered himself to be seen, even by the attendants in his bed-chamber, until he had had

time to put on his uniform and jack-boots. His severity of eye is very wholesome; it makes his writing firm, and firmness is certainly one of the first qualities that good writing must have. But there is such a thing as soft and considerate precision, as well as hard and scolding precision. Those most interesting English critics of the generation slightly anterior to Macaulay,—Hazlitt, Lamb, De Quincey, Leigh Hunt,—were fully his equals in precision, and yet they knew how to be clear, acute, and definite, without that edginess and inelasticity which is so conspicuous in Macaulay's criticisms, alike in their matter and their form.

To borrow the figure of an old writer, Macaulay's prose is not like a flowing vestment to his thought, but like a suit of armour. It is often splendid and glittering, and the movement of the opening pages of his History is superb in its dignity. But that movement is exceptional. As a rule there is the hardness, if there is also often the sheen, of highly-wrought metal. Or, to change our figure, his pages are composed as a handsome edifice is reared, not as a fine statue or a frieze 'with bossy sculptures graven' grows up in the imaginative mind of the statuary. There is no liquid continuity, such as indicates a writer possessed by his subject and not merely possessing it. The periods are marshalled in due order of procession, bright and high-stepping; they never escape under an impulse of emotion into the full current of a brimming stream. What is curious is that

though Macaulay seems ever to be brandishing a two-edged gleaming sword, and though he steeps us in an atmosphere of belligerency, yet we are never conscious of inward agitation in him, and perhaps this alone would debar him from a place among the greatest writers. For they, under that reserve, suppression, or management, which is an indispensable condition of the finest rhetorical art, even when aiming at the most passionate effects, still succeed in conveying to their readers a thrilling sense of the strong fires that are glowing underneath. Now when Macaulay advances with his hectoring sentences and his rough pistolling ways, we feel all the time that his pulse is as steady as that of the most practised duellist who ever ate fire. He is too cool to be betrayed into a single phrase of happy improvisation. His pictures glare, but are seldom warm. Those strokes of minute circumstantiality which he loved so dearly, show that even in moments when his imagination might seem to be moving both spontaneously and ardently, it was really only a literary instrument, a fashioning tool and not a melting flame. Let us take a single example. He is describing the trial of Warren Hastings. 'Every step in the proceedings,' he says, 'carried the mind either backward through many troubled centuries to the days when the foundations of our constitution were laid; or far away over boundless seas and deserts, to dusky nations living under strange stars, worshipping strange gods, and writing strange characters from right to left.

The odd triviality of the last detail, its unworthiness of the sentiment of the passage, leaves the reader checked, what sets out as a fine stroke of imagination dwindles down to a sort of literary conceit. And this puerile twist, by the way, is all the poorer, when it is considered that the native writing is really from left to right, and only takes the other direction in a foreign, that is to say, a Persian alphabet. And so in other places, even where the writer is most deservedly admired for gorgeous picturesque effect, we feel that it is only the literary picturesque, a kind of infinitely glorified newspaper-reporting. Compare, for instance, the most imaginative piece to be found in any part of Macaulay's writings with that sudden and lovely apostrophe in Carlyle, after describing the bloody horrors that followed the fall of the Bastille in 1789:—'O evening sun of July, how, at this hour, thy beams fall slant on reapers amid peaceful woody fields; on old women spinning in cottages; on ships far out in the silent main; on balls at the Orangerie at Versailles, where high-rouged dames of the Palace are even now dancing with double-jacketed Hussar officers;—and also on this roaring Hell-porch of a Hôtel de Ville!' Who does not feel in this the breath of poetic inspiration, and how different it is from the mere composite of the rhetorician's imagination, assiduously working to order?

This remark is no disparagement of Macaulay's genius, but a classification of it. We are interrogating our own impressions, and asking ourselves among

what kind of writers he ought to be placed. Rhetoric is a good and worthy art, and rhetorical authors are often more useful, more instructive, more really respectable than poetical authors. But it is to be said that Macaulay as a rhetorician will hardly be placed in the first rank, by those who have studied both him and the great masters. Once more, no amount of embellishment or emphasis or brilliant figure suffices to produce this intense effect of agitation rigorously restrained; nor can any beauty of decoration be in the least a substitute for that touching and penetrative music, which is made in prose by the repressed trouble of grave and high souls. There is a certain music, we do not deny, in Macaulay, but it is the music of a man everlastingly playing for us rapid solos on a silver trumpet, never the swelling diapasons of the organ, and never the deep ecstasies of the four magic strings. That so sensible a man as Macaulay should keep clear of the modern abomination of dithyrambic prose, that rank and sprawling weed of speech, was natural enough; but then the effects which we miss in him, and which, considering how strong the literary faculty in him really was, we are almost astonished to miss, are not produced by dithyramb but by repression. Of course the answer has been already given; Macaulay, powerful and vigorous as he was, had no agitation, no wonder, no tumult of spirit to repress. The world was spread out clear before him; he read it as plainly and as certainly as he read his books; life was all an affair of direct categoricals.

This was at least one secret of those hard modulations and shallow cadences. How poor is the rhythm of Macaulay's prose we only realise by going with his periods fresh in our ear to some true master of harmony. It is not worth while to quote passages from an author who is in everybody's library, and Macaulay is always so much like himself that almost any one page will serve for an illustration exactly as well as any other. Let any one turn to his character of Somers, for whom he had so much admiration, and then turn to Clarendon's character of Falkland;—'a person of such prodigious parts of learning and knowledge, of that inimitable sweetness and delight in conversation, of so flowing and obliging a humanity and goodness to mankind, and of that primitive simplicity and integrity of life, that if there were no other brand upon this odious and accursed civil war than that single loss, it must be most infamous and execrable to all posterity.' Now Clarendon is not a great writer, not even a good writer, for he is prolix and involved, yet we see that even Clarendon, when he comes to a matter in which his heart is engaged, becomes sweet and harmonious in his rhythm. If we turn to a prose-writer of the very first place, we are instantly conscious of a still greater difference. How flashy and shallow Macaulay's periods seem, as we listen to the fine ground-base that rolls in the melody of the following passage of Burke's, and it is taken from one of the least ornate of all his pieces:—

You will not, we trust, believe that, born in a civilised country, formed to gentle manners, trained in a merciful religion, and living in enlightened and polished times, where even foreign hostility is softened from its original sternness, we could have thought of letting loose upon you, our late beloved brethren, these fierce tribes of savages and cannibals, in whom the traces of human nature are effaced by ignorance and barbarity. We rather wished to have joined with you in bringing gradually that unhappy part of mankind into civility, order, piety, and virtuous discipline, than to have confirmed their evil habits and increased their natural ferocity by fleshing them in the slaughter of you, whom our wiser and better ancestors had sent into the wilderness with the express view of introducing, along with our holy religion, its humane and charitable manners. We do not hold that all things are lawful in war. We should think every barbarity, in fire, in wasting, in murders, in tortures, and other cruelties, too horrible and too full of turpitude for Christian mouths to utter or ears to hear, if done at our instigation, by those who we know will make war thus if they make it at all, to be, to all intents and purposes, as if done by ourselves. We clear ourselves to you our brethren, to the present age, and to future generations, to our king and our country, and to Europe, which as a spectator, beholds this tragic scene, of every part or share in adding this last and worst of evils to the inevitable mischiefs of a civil war.

We do not call you rebels and traitors. We do not call for the vengeance of the crown against you. We do not know how to qualify millions of our countrymen, contending with one heart for an admission to privileges which we have ever thought our own happiness and honour, by odious and unworthy names. On the contrary, we highly revere the principles on which you act, though we lament some of their effects. Armed as you are, we embrace you, as our friends and as our brethren by the best and dearest ties of relation.

It may be said that there is a patent injustice in comparing the prose of a historian criticising or describing great events at second hand, with the prose of a statesman taking active part in great events, fired by the passion of a present conflict, and stimulated by the vivid interest of undetermined issues. If this be a well-grounded plea, and it may be so, then of course it excludes a contrast not only with Burke, but also with Bolingbroke, whose fine manners and polished gaiety give us a keen sense of the grievous garishness of Macaulay. If we may not institute a comparison between Macaulay and great actors on the stage of affairs, at least there can be no objection to the introduction of Southey as a standard of comparison. Southey was a man of letters pure and simple, and it is worth remarking that Macaulay himself admitted that he found so great a charm in Southey's style, as nearly always to read it with pleasure, even when Southey was talking nonsense. Now, take any page of the Life of Nelson or the Life of Wesley; consider how easy, smooth, natural, and winning is the diction and the rise and fall of the sentence, and yet how varied the rhythm and how nervous the phrases; and then turn to a page of Macaulay, and wince under its stamping emphasis, its over-coloured tropes, its exaggerated expressions, its unlovely staccato. Southey's History of the Peninsular War is now dead, but if any of my readers has a copy on his highest shelves, I would venture to ask him to take down the third volume,

and read the concluding pages, of which Coleridge used to say that they were the finest specimen of historic eulogy he had ever read in English, adding with forgivable hyperbole, that they were more to the Duke's fame and glory than a campaign. 'Foresight and enterprise with our commander went hand in hand; he never advanced but so as to be sure of his retreat; and never retreated but in such an attitude as to impose upon a superior enemy,' and so on through the sum of Wellington's achievements. 'There was something more precious than these, more to be desired than the high and enduring fame which he had secured by his military achievements, the satisfaction of thinking to what end those achievements had been directed; that they were for the deliverance of two most injured and grievously oppressed nations; for the safety, honour, and welfare of his own country; and for the general interests of Europe and of the civilised world. His campaigns were sanctified by the cause; they were sullied by no cruelties, no crimes; the chariot-wheels of his triumphs have been followed by no curses; his laurels are entwined with the amaranths of righteousness, and upon his death-bed he might remember his victories among his good works.'

What is worse than want of depth and fineness of intonation in a period, is all gross excess of colour, because excess of colour is connected with graver faults in the region of the intellectual conscience. Macaulay is a constant sinner in this respect. The

wine of truth is in his cup a brandied draught, a hundred degrees above proof, and he too often replenishes the lamp of knowledge with naphtha instead of fine oil. It is not that he has a spontaneous passion for exuberant decoration, which he would have shared with more than one of the greatest names in literature. On the contrary, we feel that the exaggerated words and dashing sentences are the fruit of deliberate travail, and the petulance or the irony of his speech is mostly due to a driving predilection for strong effects. His memory, his directness, his aptitude for forcing things into firm outline, and giving them a sharply defined edge,—these and other singular talents of his all lent themselves to this intrepid and indefatigable pursuit of effect. And the most disagreeable feature is that Macaulay was so often content with an effect of an essentially vulgar kind, offensive to taste, discordant to the fastidious ear, and worst of all, at enmity with the whole spirit of truth. By vulgar we certainly do not mean homely, which marks a wholly different quality. No writer can be more homely than Mr. Carlyle, alike in his choice of particulars to dwell upon, and in the terms or images in which he describes or illustrates them, but there is also no writer further removed from vulgarity. Nor do we mean that Macaulay too copiously enriches the tongue with infusion from any Doric dialect. For such raciness he had little taste. What we find in him is that quality which the French call brutal. The description, for instance, in the

essay on Hallam, of the licence of the Restoration, seems to us a coarse and vulgar picture, whose painter took the most garish colours he could find on his palette, and then laid them on in untempered crudity. And who is not sensible of the vulgarity and coarseness of the account of Boswell? 'If he had not been a great fool he would not have been a great writer he was a dunce, a parasite, and a coxcomb,' and so forth, in which the shallowness of the analysis of Boswell's character matches the puerile rudeness of the terms. Here again, is a sentence about Montesquieu. 'The English at that time,' Macaulay says of the middle of the eighteenth century, 'considered a Frenchman who talked about constitutional checks and fundamental laws as a prodigy not less astonishing than the learned pig or musical infant.' And he then goes on to describe the author of one of the most important books that ever were written, as 'specious but shallow, studious of effect, indifferent to truth—the lively President,' and so forth, stirring in any reader who happens to know Montesquieu's influence, a singular amazement. We are not concerned with the judgment upon Montesquieu, nor with the truth as to contemporary English opinion about him, but a writer who devises an antithesis to such a man as Montesquieu in learned pigs and musical infants, deliberately condescends not merely to triviality or levity, but to flat vulgarity of thought, to something of mean and ignoble association. Though one of the most common, this is not

Macaulay's only sin in the same unfortunate direction. He too frequently resorts to vulgar gaudiness. For example, there is in one place a certain description of an alleged practice of Addison's. Swift had said of Esther Johnson that 'whether from easiness in general, or from her indifference to persons, or from her despair of mending them, or from the same practice which she most liked in Mr. Addison, I cannot determine; but when she saw any of the company very warm in a wrong opinion, she was more inclined to confirm them in it than to oppose them. It prevented noise, she said, and saved time.'[1] Let us behold what a picture Macaulay draws on the strength of this passage. 'If his first attempts to set a presuming dunce right were ill-received,' Macaulay says of Addison, 'he changed his tone, "assented with civil leer," and lured the flattered coxcomb deeper and deeper into absurdity.' To compare this transformation of the simplicity of the original into the grotesque heat and overcharged violence of the copy, is to see the homely maiden of a country village transformed into the painted flaunter of the city.

One more instance. We should be sorry to violate any sentiment of τὸ σεμνόν about a man of Macaulay's genius, but what is a decorous term for a description of the doctrine of Lucretius's great poem, thrown in parenthetically, as the 'silliest and meanest system of natural and moral philosophy!' Even disagreeable artifices of composition may be forgiven, when they

[1] Forster's *Swift*, i. 265.

serve to vivify truth, to quicken or to widen the moral judgment, but Macaulay's hardy and habitual recourse to strenuous superlatives is fundamentally unscientific and untrue. There is no more instructive example in our literature than he, of the saying that the adjective is the enemy of the substantive.

In 1837 Jeffrey saw a letter written by Macaulay to a common friend, and stating the reasons for preferring a literary to a political life. Jeffrey thought that his illustrious ally was wrong in the conclusion to which he came. 'As to the tranquillity of an author's life,' he said, 'I have no sort of faith in it. And as to fame, if an author's is now and then more lasting, it is generally longer withheld, and except in a few rare cases it is of a less pervading or elevating description. A great poet or a great *original* writer is above all other glory. But who would give much for such a glory as Gibbon's? Besides, I believe it is in the inward glow and pride of consciously influencing the destinies of mankind, much more than in the sense of personal reputation, that the delight of either poet or statesman chiefly consists.' And Gibbon had at least the advantage of throwing himself into a religious controversy that is destined to endure for centuries. He, moreover, was specifically a historian, while Macaulay has been prized less as a historian proper than as a master of literary art. Now a man of letters, in an age of battle and transition like our own, fades into an ever-deepening dis-

tance, unless he has while he writes that touching and impressive quality,—the presentiment of the eve ; a feeling of the difficulties and interests that will engage and distract mankind on the morrow. Nor can it be enough for enduring fame in any age merely to throw a golden halo round the secularity of the hour, or to make glorious the narrowest limitations of the passing day. If we think what a changed sense is already given to criticism, what a different conception now presides over history, how many problems on which Macaulay was silent are now the familiar puzzles of even superficial readers, we cannot help feeling that the eminent man whose life we are all about to read, is the hero of a past which is already remote, and that he did little to make men better fitted to face a present of which, close as it was to him, he seems hardly to have dreamed.

EMERSON.

A GREAT interpreter of life ought not himself to need interpretation, least of all can he need it for contemporaries. When time has wrought changes of fashion, mental and social, the critic serves a useful turn in giving to a poet or a teacher his true place, and in recovering ideas and points of view that are worth preserving. Interpretation of this kind Emerson cannot require. His books are no palimpsest, 'the prophet's holograph, defiled, erased, and covered by a monk's.' What he has written is fresh, legible, and in full conformity with the manners and the diction of the day, and those who are unable to understand him without gloss and comment are in fact not prepared to understand what it is that the original has to say. Scarcely any literature is so entirely unprofitable as the so-called criticism that overlays a pithy text with a windy sermon. For our time at least Emerson may best be left to be his own expositor.

Nor is Emerson, either, in the case of those whom the world has failed to recognise, and whom therefore it is the business of the critic to make known and to

define. It is too soon to say in what particular niche among the teachers of the race posterity will place him; enough that in our own generation he has already been accepted as one of the wise masters, who, being called to high thinking for generous ends, did not fall below his vocation, but, steadfastly pursuing the pure search for truth, without propounding a system or founding a school or cumbering himself overmuch about applications, lived the life of the spirit, and breathed into other men a strong desire after the right governance of the soul. All this is generally realised and understood, and men may now be left to find their way to the Emersonian doctrine without the critic's prompting. Though it is only the other day that Emerson walked the earth and was alive and among us, he is already one of the privileged few whom the reader approaches in the mood of settled respect, and whose names have surrounded themselves with an atmosphere of religion.

It is not particularly profitable, again, to seek for Emerson one of the labels out of the philosophic handbooks. Was he the prince of Transcendentalists, or the prince of Idealists? Are we to look for the sources of his thought in Kant or Jacobi, in Fichte or Schelling? How does he stand towards Parmenides and Zeno, the Egotheism of the Sufis, or the position of the Megareans? Shall we put him on the shelf with the Stoics or the Mystics, with Quietist, Pantheist, Determinist? If life were long, it might be worth while to trace Emerson's affinities with the

philosophic schools; to collect and infer his answers to the everlasting problems of psychology and metaphysics; to extract a set of coherent and reasoned opinions about knowledge and faculty, experience and consciousness, truth and necessity, the absolute and the relative. But such inquiries would only take us the further away from the essence and vitality of Emerson's mind and teaching. In philosophy proper Emerson made no contribution of his own, but accepted, apparently without much examination of the other side, from Coleridge after Kant, the intuitive, *à priori* and realist theory respecting the sources of human knowledge, and the objects that are within the cognisance of the human faculties. This was his starting-point, and within its own sphere of thought he cannot be said to have carried it any further. What he did was to light up these doctrines with the rays of ethical and poetic imagination. As it has been justly put, though Emersonian transcendentalism is usually spoken of as a philosophy, it is more justly regarded as a gospel.[1] But before dwelling more on this, let us look into the record of his life, of which we may say in all truth that no purer, simpler, and more harmonious story can be found in the annals of farshining men.

[1] Frothingham's *Transcendentalism in New England: a History*—a judicious, acute, and highly interesting piece of criticism.

I.

Ralph Waldo Emerson was born at Boston, May 25, 1803. He was of an ancient and honourable English stock, who had transplanted themselves, on one side from Cheshire and Bedfordshire, and on the other from Durham and York, a hundred and seventy years before. For seven or eight generations in a direct and unbroken line his forefathers had been preachers and divines, not without eminence in the Puritan tradition of New England. His second name came into the family with Rebecca Waldo, with whom at the end of the seventeenth century one Edward Emerson had intermarried, and whose family had fled from the Waldensian valleys and that slaughter of the saints which Milton called on Heaven to avenge. Every tributary, then, that made Emerson what he was, flowed not only from Protestantism, but from 'the Protestantism of the Protestant religion.' When we are told that Puritanism inexorably locked up the intelligence of its votaries in a dark and straitened chamber, it is worthy to be remembered that the genial, open, lucid, and most comprehensive mind of Emerson was the ripened product of a genealogical tree that at every stage of its growth had been vivified by Puritan sap.

Not many years after his birth, Emerson's mother was left a widow with narrow means, and he underwent the wholesome training of frugality in youth. When the time came, he was sent to Harvard. When

Clough visited America a generation later, the collegiate training does not appear to have struck him very favourably. 'They learn French and history and German, and a great many more things than in England, but only imperfectly.' This was said from the standard of Rugby and Balliol, and the method that Clough calls imperfect had merits of its own. The pupil lost much in a curriculum that had a certain rawness about it, compared with the traditional culture that was at that moment (1820) just beginning to acquire a fresh hold within the old gray quadrangles of Oxford. On the other hand, the training at Harvard struck fewer of those superfluous roots in the mind, which are only planted that they may be presently cast out again with infinite distraction and waste.

When his schooling was over, Emerson began to prepare himself for the ministrations of the pulpit, and in 1826 and 1827 he preached in divers places. Two years later he was ordained, and undertook the charge of an important Unitarian Church in Boston. It was not very long before the strain of forms, comparatively moderate as it was in the Unitarian body, became too heavy to be borne. Emerson found that he could no longer accept the usual view of the Communion Service, even in its least sacramental interpretation. To him the rite was purely spiritual in origin and intent, and at the best only to be retained as a commemoration. The whole world, he said, had been full of idols and ordinances and forms,

when 'the Almighty God was pleased to qualify and send forth a man to teach men that they must serve him with the heart; that only that life was religious which was thoroughly good; that sacrifice was smoke and forms were shadows. This man lived and died true to that purpose; and now with his blessed word and life before us, Christians must contend that it is a matter of vital importance, really a duty, to commemorate him by a certain form, whether that form be agreeable to their understandings or not. Is not this to make vain the gift of God? Is not this to make men forget that not forms but duties—not names but righteousness and love—are enjoined?'

He was willing to continue the service with that explanation, and on condition that he should not himself partake of the bread and wine. The congregation would fain have kept one whose transparent purity of soul had attached more than his heresy had alienated. But the innovation was too great, and Emerson resigned his charge (1832). For some five or six years longer he continued occasionally to preach, and more than one congregation would have accepted him. But doubts on the subject of public prayer began to weigh upon his mind. He suspected the practice by which one man offered up prayer vicariously and collectively for the assembled congregation. Was not that too, like the Communion Service, a form that tended to deaden the spirit? Under the influence of this and other scruples he finally ceased to preach (1838), and told his friends that henceforth he must

find his pulpit in the platform of the lecturer. 'I see not,' he said, 'why this is not the most flexible of all organs of opinion, from its popularity and from its newness, permitting you to say what you think, without any shackles of proscription. The pulpit in our age certainly gives forth an obstructed and uncertain sound; and the faith of those in it, if men of genius, may differ so much from that of those under it as to embarrass the conscience of the speaker, because so much is attributed to him from the fact of standing there.' The lecture was an important discovery, and it has had many consequences in American culture. Among the more undesirable of them has been (certainly not in Emerson's own case) the importation of the pulpit accent into subjects where one would be happier without it.

Earlier in the same year in which he retired from his church at Boston, Emerson had lost his young wife. Though we may well believe that he bore these agitations with self-control, his health suffered, and in the spring of 1833 he started for Europe. He came to be accused of saying captious things about travelling. There are three wants, he said, that can never be satisfied: that of the rich who want something more; that of the sick who want something different; and that of the traveller who says, Anywhere but here. Their restlessness, he told his countrymen, argued want of character. They were infatuated with 'the rococo toy of Italy.' As if what was true anywhere were not true everywhere; and as

if a man, go where he will, can find more beauty or worth than he carries. All this was said, as we shall see that much else was said by Emerson, by way of reaction and protest against instability of soul in the people around him. 'Here or nowhere,' said Goethe inversely to unstable Europeans yearning vaguely westwards, 'here or nowhere is thine America.' To the use of travel for its own ends, Emerson was of course as much alive as other people. 'There is in every constitution a certain solstice when the stars stand still in our inward firmament, and when there is required some foreign force, some diversion or alteration, to prevent stagnation. And as a medical remedy, travel seems one of the best.' He found it so in 1833. But this and his two other voyages to Europe make no Odyssey. When Voltaire was pressed to visit Rome, he declared that he would be better pleased with some new and free English book than with all the glories of amphitheatre and of arch. Emerson in like manner seems to have thought more of the great writers whom he saw in Europe than of buildings or of landscapes. 'Am I,' he said, 'who have hung over their works in my chamber at home, not to see these men in the flesh, and thank them, and interchange some thoughts with them?' The two Englishmen to whom he owed most were Coleridge and Wordsworth; and the younger writer, some eight years older than himself, in whom his liveliest interest had been kindled, was Carlyle. He was fortunate enough to

have converse with all three, and he has told the world how these illustrious men in their several fashions and degrees impressed him.[1] It was Carlyle who struck him most. 'Many a time upon the sea, in my homeward voyage, I remembered with joy the favoured condition of my lonely philosopher,' cherishing visions more than divine 'in his stern and blessed solitude.' So Carlyle, with no less cordiality, declares that among the figures that he could recollect as visiting his Nithsdale hermitage—'all like Apparitions now, bringing with them airs from Heaven, or the blasts from the other region, there is not one of a more undoubtedly supernal character than yourself; so pure and still, with intents so charitable; and then vanishing too so soon into the azure Inane, as an Apparition should.'

In external incident Emerson's life was uneventful. Nothing could be simpler, of more perfect unity, or more free from disturbing episodes that leaves scars on men. In 1834 he settled in old Concord, the home of his ancestors, then in its third century. 'Concord is very bare,' wrote Clough, who made some sojourn there in 1852, 'and so is the country in general; it is a small sort of village, almost entirely of wood houses, painted white, with Venetian blinds, green outside, with two white wooden churches. There are some American elms of a weeping kind, and

[1] *English Traits*, 7-18. *Ireland*, 143-152 Froude's *Carlyle*, ii. 355-359

sycamores, *i.e.* planes; but the wood is mostly pine—white pine and yellow pine—somewhat scrubby, occupying the tops of the low banks, and marshy hay-land between, very brown now. A little brook runs through to the Concord River.'[1] The brook flowed across the few acres that were Emerson's first modest homestead. 'The whole external appearance of the place,' says one who visited him, 'suggests old-fashioned comfort and hospitality. Within the house the flavour of antiquity is still more noticeable. Old pictures look down from the walls; quaint blue-and-white china holds the simple dinner; old furniture brings to mind the generations of the past. At the right as you enter is Mr. Emerson's library, a large square room, plainly furnished, but made pleasant by pictures and sunshine. The homely shelves that line the walls are well filled with books. There is a lack of showy covers or rich bindings, and each volume seems to have soberly grown old in constant service. Mr. Emerson's study is a quiet room up-stairs.'

Fate did not spare him the strokes of the common lot. His first wife died after three short years of wedded happiness. He lost a little son, who was the light of his eyes. But others were born to him, and in all the relations and circumstances of domestic life he was one of the best and most beloved of men. He long carried in his mind the picture of Carlyle's life at Craigenputtock as the ideal for the sage, but his

[1] Clough's *Life and Letters*, i. 185.

own choice was far wiser and happier, 'not wholly in the busy world, nor quite beyond it.'

'Besides my house,' he told Carlyle in 1838, 'I have, I believe, 22,000 dollars, whose income in ordinary years is six per cent. I have no other tithe or glebe except the income of my winter lectures, which was last winter 800 dollars. Well, with this income, here at home, I am a rich man. I stay at home and go abroad at my own instance, I have food, warmth, leisure, books, friends. Go away from home, I am rich no longer. I never have a dollar to spend on a fancy. As no wise man, I suppose, ever was rich in the sense of *freedom to spend*, because of the inundation of claims, so neither am I, who am not wise. But at home I am rich—rich enough for ten brothers. My wife Lidian is an incarnation of Christianity,—I call her Asia,—and keeps my philosophy from Antinomianism; my mother, whitest, mildest, most conservative of ladies, whose only exception to her universal preference for old things is her son; my boy, a piece of love and sunshine, well worth my watching from morning to night;—these, and three domestic women, who cook and sew and run for us, make all my household. Here I sit and read and write, with very little system, and, as far as regards composition, with the most fragmentary result: paragraphs incompressible, each sentence an infinitely repellent particle.

'In summer, with the aid of a neighbour, I manage my garden; and a week ago I set out on the west

side of my house forty young pine trees to protect me or my son from the wind of January. The ornament of the place is the occasional presence of some ten or twelve persons, good and wise, who visit us in the course of the year.'

As time went on he was able to buy himself 'a new plaything'—a piece of woodland, of more than forty acres, on the border of a little lake half a mile wide or more, called Walden Pond. 'In these May days,' he told Carlyle, then passionately struggling with his *Cromwell*, with the slums of Chelsea at his back, 'when maples, poplars, oaks, birches, walnut, and pine, are in their spring glory, I go thither every afternoon, and cut with my hatchet an Indian path through the thicket, all along the bold shore, and open the finest pictures' (1845).

He loved to write at 'large leisure in noble mornings, opened by prayer or by readings of Plato, or whatsoever else is dearest to the Morning Muse.' Yet he could not wholly escape the recluse's malady. He confesses that he sometimes craves 'that stimulation which every capricious, languid, and languescent study needs.' Carlyle's potent concentration stirs his envy. The work of the garden and the orchard he found very fascinating, eating up days and weeks; 'nay, a brave scholar should shun it like gambling, and take refuge in cities and hotels from these pernicious enchantments.'

In the doings of his neighbourhood he bore his part; he took a manly interest in civil affairs, and

was sensible, shrewd, and helpful in matters of practical judgment. Pilgrims, sane and insane, the beardless and the gray-headed, flocked to his door, far beyond the dozen persons good and wise whom he had mentioned to Carlyle. 'Uncertain, troubled, earnest wanderers through the midnight of the moral world beheld his intellectual fire as a beacon burning on a hill-top, and climbing the difficult ascent, looked forth into the surrounding obscurity more hopefully than hitherto' (*Hawthorne*). To the most intractable of Transcendental bores, worst species of the genus, he was never impatient, nor denied himself; nor did he ever refuse counsel where the case was not yet beyond hope. Hawthorne was for a time his neighbour (1842-45). 'It was good,' says Hawthorne, 'to meet him in the wood-paths, or sometimes in our avenue, with that pure intellectual gleam diffused about his presence like the garment of a shining one; and he so quiet, so simple, so without pretension, encountering each man alive as if expecting to receive more than he could impart.'

The most remarkable of all his neighbours was Thoreau, who for a couple of years lived in a hut which he had built for himself on the shore of Walden Pond. If he had not written some things with a considerable charm of style, Thoreau might have been wisely neglected as one of the crazy. But Emerson was struck by the originality of his life, and thought it well in time to edit the writings of one 'who was bred to no profession; never married; lived alone; never

went to Church; never voted; refused to pay a tax to the State; ate no flesh, drank no wine, never knew the use of tobacco; had no temptations to fight against, no appetites, no passions, refused all invitations, preferred a good Indian to highly cultivated people, and said he would rather go to Oregon than to London.' The world has room for every type, so that it be not actively noxious, and this whimsical egotist may well have his place in the catalogue. He was, after all, in his life only a compendium, on a scale large enough to show their absurdity, of all those unsocial notions which Emerson in other manifestations found it needful to rebuke. Yet we may agree that many of his paradoxes strike home with Socratic force to the heart of a civilisation that wise men know to be too purely material, too artificial, and too capriciously diffused.

Emerson himself was too sane ever to fall into the hermit's trap of banishment to the rocks and echoes. 'Solitude,' he said, 'is impracticable, and society fatal.' He steered his way as best he could between these two irreconcilable necessities. He had, as we have seen, the good sense to make for himself a calling which brought him into healthy contact with bodies of men, and made it essential that he should have his listeners in some degree in his mind, even when they were not actually present to the eye. As a preacher Emerson has been described as making a deep impression on susceptible hearers of a quiet mind, by 'the calm dignity of his bearing, the absence of all oratorical effort, and the singular simplicity and directness of

a manner free from the least trace of dogmatic assumption.' 'Not long before,' says this witness, 'I had listened to a wonderful sermon by Chalmers, whose force and energy, and vehement but rather turgid eloquence, carried for the moment all before him—his audience becoming like clay in the hands of the potter. But I must confess that the pregnant thoughts and serene self-possession of the young Boston minister had a greater charm for me than all the rhetorical splendours of Chalmers' (*Ireland*, 141).

At the lecturer's desk the same attraction made itself still more effectually felt. 'I have heard some great speakers and some accomplished orators,' Mr. Lowell says, 'but never any that so moved and persuaded men as he. There is a kind of undertone in that rich barytone of his that sweeps our minds from their foothold into deep waters with a drift that we cannot and would not resist. Search for his eloquence in his books and you will perchance miss it, but meanwhile you will find that it has kindled all your thoughts.' The same effect was felt in its degree wherever he went, and he took pains not to miss it. He had made a study of his art, and was so skilful in his mastery of it that it seemed as if anybody might do all that he did and do it as well—if only a hundred failures had not proved the mistake.

In 1838 Emerson delivered an address in the Divinity School of Harvard, which produced a gusty shower of articles, sermons, and pamplets, and raised him without will or further act of his to the high

place of the heresiarch. With admirable singleness of mind, he held modestly aloof. 'There is no scholar,' he wrote to a friend, 'less willing or less able to be a polemic. I could not give account of myself if challenged. I delight in telling what I think, but if you ask me how I dare say so, or why it is so, I am the most helpless of men.' The year before, his oration on the American Scholar had filled Carlyle with delight. It was the first clear utterance, after long decades of years, in which he had 'heard nothing but infinite jangling and jabbering, and inarticulate twittering and screeching.' Then Carlyle enjoined on his American friend for rule of life, 'Give no ear to any man's praise or censure; know that that is *not* it; on the one side is as Heaven, if you have strength to keep silent and climb unseen; yet on the other side, yawning always at one's right hand and one's left, is the frightfullest Abyss and Pandemonium' (Dec. 8, 1837). Emerson's temperament and his whole method made the warning needless, and, as before, while 'vociferous platitude was dinning his ears on all sides,' a whole world of thought was 'silently building itself in these calm depths.' But what would those two divinities of his, Plato and Socrates, have said of a man who 'could not give an account of himself if challenged'? Assuredly not every one who saith Plato, Plato, is admitted to that ideal kingdom.

It was soon after this that the *Dial* was projected. It had its origin in the Transcendental Club, a little

knot of speculative students at Boston, who met four or five times a year at one another's houses to discuss questions mainly theological, from more liberal points of view than was at that time common, 'the air then in America getting a little too close and stagnant.' The Club was first formed in 1836. The *Dial* appeared in 1840, and went on for four years at quarterly intervals. Emerson was a constant contributor, and for the last half of its existence he acted as editor. 'I submitted,' he told Carlyle, 'to what seemed a necessity of petty literary patriotism—I know not what else to call it—and took charge of our thankless little *Dial* here, without subscribers enough to pay even a publisher, much less any labourer; it has no penny for editor or contributor, nothing but abuse in the newspapers, or, at best, silence; but it serves as a sort of portfolio, to carry about a few poems or sentences which would otherwise be transcribed or circulated, and we always are waiting until somebody shall come and make it good. But I took it, and it took me and a great deal of good time to a small purpose' (July 1, 1842). On the whole one must agree that it was to small purpose. Emerson's name has reflected lustre on the *Dial*, but when his contributions are taken out, and, say, half a dozen besides, the residuum is in the main very poor stuff, and some of it has a droll resemblance to the talk between Mrs. Hominy and the Literary Ladies and the Honourable Elijah Pogram. Margaret Fuller—the Miranda, Zenobia, Hypatia, Minerva of her time, and a truly remark-

able figure in the gallery of wonderful women—edited it for two years, and contributed many a vivid, dashing, exuberant, ebullient page. Her criticism of Goethe, for example, contains no final or valid word, but it is fresh, cordial, and frank, and no other prose contributor, again saving the one great name, has anything to say that is so readable. Nearly all the rest is extinct, and the *Dial* now finds itself far away from the sunshine of human interest.

In 1841 the first series of Emerson's Essays was published, and three years later the second. The Poems were first collected in 1847, but the final version was not made until 1876. In 1847 Emerson paid his second visit to England, and delivered his lectures on Representative Men, collected and published in 1850. The books are said to have had a very slow sale, but the essays and lectures published in 1860, with the general title of *The Conduct of Life*, started with a sale of 2,500 copies, though that volume has never been considered by the Emersonian adept to contain most of the pure milk of the Word.

Then came that great event in the history of men and institutions, the Civil War. We look with anxiety for the part played by the serene thinker when the hour had struck for violent and heroic action. Emerson had hitherto been a Free Soiler; he had opposed the extension of slavery; and he favoured its compulsory extinction, with compensation on the plan of our own policy in the West Indies. He had never joined the active Abolitionists, nor did he see 'that

there was any particular thing for him to do in it then.' 'Though I sometimes accept a popular call, and preach on Temperance or the Abolition of Slavery, I am sure to feel, before I have done with it, what an intrusion it is into another sphere, and so much loss of virtue in my own' (*To Carlyle*, 1844). But he missed no occasion of showing that in conviction and aim he was with good men. The infirmities of fanatics never hid from him either the transcendent purity of their motives or the grandeur of their cause. This is ever the test of the scholar: whether he allows intellectual fastidiousness to stand between him and the great issues of his time. 'Cannot the English,' he cried out to Carlyle, 'leave cavilling at petty failures and bad manners and at the dunce part, and leap to the suggestions and finger-pointings of the gods, which, above the understanding, feed the hopes and guide the wills of men?' These finger-pointings Emerson did not mistake. He spoke up for Garrison. John Brown was several times in Concord, and found a hearty welcome in Emerson's house. When Brown made his raid at Harper's Ferry, and the crisis became gradually sharper, Emerson felt that the time had come, and his voice was raised in clear tones. After the sword is drawn, it is deeds not words that interest and decide; but whenever the word of the student was needed Emerson was ready to give the highest expression to all that was best in his countrymen's mood during that greatest ordeal of our time. The inward regeneration of the individual had ever been the key

to his teaching, and this teaching had been one of the forces that, like central fire in men's minds, nourished the heroism of the North in its immortal battle.

The exaltation of national character produced by the Civil War opened new and wider acceptance for a great moral and spiritual teacher, and from the close of the war until his death in 1882, Emerson's ascendency within his own sphere of action was complete, and the public recognition of him universal. Of story, there is no more to tell. He pursued his old way of reading, meditating, conversing, and public lecturing, almost to the end. The afternoon of his life was cloudless as the earlier day, and the shades of twilight fell in unbroken serenity. In his last years there was a partial failure of his memory, and more than one pathetic story is told of this tranquil and gradual eclipse. But 'to the last, even when the events of yesterday were occasionally obscured, his memory of the remote past was unclouded; he would tell about the friends of his early and middle life with unbroken vigour.' So, tended in his home by warm filial devotion, and surrounded by the reverent kindness of his village neighbours, this wise and benign man slowly passed away (April 27, 1882).[1]

[1] The reader who seeks full information about Emerson's life will find it scattered in various volumes: among them are—

Ralph Waldo Emerson; by George Willis Cooke (Sampson Low & Co., 1882)—a very diligent and instructive work.

R. W. E.; by Alexander Ireland (Simpkin, Marshall, & Co. 1882), described by Carlyle, and known by others, as 'full of energy and broad sagacity and practicality; infinitely well

II.

It cannot be truly said that Emerson is one of the writers who make their way more easily into our minds by virtue of style. That his writing has quality and flavour none but a pure pedant would deny. His more fervent votaries, however, provoke us with a challenge that goes far beyond this. They declare that the finish, charm, and beauty of the writing are as worthy of remark as the truth and depth of the thought. It is even 'unmatchable and radiant,' says one. Such exaggerations can have no reference to any accepted standard. It would in truth, have been a marvel if Emerson had excelled in the virtues of the written page, for most of his published work was originally composed and used for the platform. Everybody knows how different are the speaker's devices for gaining possession of his audience, from the writer's means of winning, persuading, and impressing the attention of his reader. The key to the difference may be that in the speech the personality of the orator before our eyes gives of itself that oneness and continuity of communication, which the writer has to seek in the orderly sequence and array of marshalled

affected to the man Emerson too,'—and full moreover of that intellectual enthusiasm which in his Scotch countrymen goes so often with their practicalities.

Emerson, at Home and Abroad; by Moncure D. Conway (Trübner & Co., 1883): the work of a faithful disciple, who knew Emerson well, and has here recorded many interesting anecdotes and traits.

sentence and well-sustained period. One of the traits that every critic notes in Emerson's writing, is that it is so abrupt, so sudden in its transitions, so discontinuous, so inconsecutive. Dislike of a sentence that drags made him unconscious of the quality, that French critics name *coulant*. Everything is thrown in just as it comes, and sometimes the pell-mell is enough to persuade us that Pope did not exaggerate when he said that no one qualification is so likely to make a good writer, as the power of rejecting his own thoughts.

His manner as a lecturer, says Dr. Holmes, was an illustration of his way of thinking. 'He would lose his place just as his mind would drop its thought and pick up another, twentieth cousin or no relation at all to it.' The same manner, whether we liken it to mosaic or to kaleidoscope, marks his writing. It makes him hard to follow, oracular, and enigmatical. 'Can you tell me,' asked one of his neighbour, while Emerson was lecturing, 'what connection there is between that last sentence and the one that went before, and what connection it all has with Plato?' 'None, my friend, save in God!' This is excellent in a seer, but less so in the writer.

Apart from his difficult staccato, Emerson is not free from secondary faults. He uses words that are not only odd, but vicious in construction; he is not always grammatically correct; he is sometimes oblique, and he is often clumsy; and there is a visible feeling after epigrams that do not always come. When people say

that Emerson's style must be good and admirable because it fits his thought, they forget that though it is well that a robe should fit, there is still something to be said about its cut and fashion.

No doubt, to borrow Carlyle's expression, 'the talent is not the chief question here: the idea—that is the chief question.' We do not profess to be of those to whom mere style is as dear as it was to Plutarch; of him it was said that he would have made Pompey win the battle of Pharsalia, if it could have given a better turn to a phrase. It would not be worth while to speak of form in a thinker to whom our debt is so large for his matter, if there were not so much bad literary imitation of Emerson. Dr. Holmes mournfully admits that 'one who talks like Emerson or like Carlyle soon finds himself surrounded by a crowd of walking phonographs, who mechanically reproduce his mental and oral accents. Emerson was before long talking in the midst of a babbling Simonetta of echoes.' Inferior writers have copied the tones of the oracle without first making sure of the inspiration. They forget that a platitude is not turned into a profundity by being dressed up as a conundrum. Pithiness in him dwindles into tenuity in them; honest discontinuity in the master is made an excuse for finical incoherencies in the disciples; the quaint, ingenious, and unexpected collocations of the original degenerate in the imitators into a trick of unmeaning surprise and vapid antithesis; and his pregnant sententiousness set the fashion of a sententiousness that is not

fertility but only hydropsy. This curious infection, which has spread into divers forms of American literature that are far removed from philosophy, would have been impossible if the teacher had been as perfect in expression as he was pure, diligent, and harmonious in his thinking.

Yet, as happens to all fine minds, there came to Emerson ways of expression deeply marked with character. On every page there is set the strong stamp of sincerity, and the attraction of a certain artlessness; the most awkward sentence rings true; and there is often a pure and simple note that touches us more than if it were the perfection of elaborated melody. The uncouth procession of the periods discloses the travail of the thought, and that too is a kind of eloquence. An honest reader easily forgives the rude jolt or unexpected start when it shows a thinker faithfully working his way along arduous and unworn tracks. Even at the roughest, Emerson often interjects a delightful cadence. As he says of Landor, his sentences are cubes which will stand firm, place them how or where you will. He criticised Swedenborg for being superfluously explanatory, and having an exaggerated feeling of the ignorance of men. 'Men take truths of this nature,' said Emerson, 'very fast;' and his own style does no doubt very boldly take this capacity for granted in us. In 'choice and pith of diction,' again, of which Mr. Lowell speaks, he hits the mark with a felicity that is almost his own in this generation. He is terse, concentrated, and free

from the important blunder of mistaking intellectual dawdling for meditation. Nor in fine does his abruptness ever impede a true urbanity. The accent is homely and the apparel plain, but his bearing has a friendliness, a courtesy, a hospitable humanity, which goes nearer to our hearts than either literary decoration or rhetorical unction. That modest and lenient fellow-feeling which gave such charm to his companionship breathes in his gravest writing, and prevents us from finding any page of it cold or hard or dry.

Though Emerson was always urgent for 'the soul of the world, clean from all vestige of tradition,' yet his work is full of literature. He at least lends no support to the comforting fallacy of the indolent, that originating power does not go with assimilating power. Few thinkers on his level display such breadth of literary reference. Unlike Wordsworth, who was content with a few tattered volumes on a kitchen shelf, Emerson worked among books. When he was a boy he found a volume of Montaigne, and he never forgot the delight and wonder in which he lived with it. His library is described as filled with well-selected authors, with curious works from the eastern world, with many editions in both Greek and English of his favourite Plato; while portraits of Shakespeare, Montaigne, Goethe, Dante, looked down upon him from the walls. Produce a volume of Plato or of Shakespeare, he says somewhere, or '*only remind us of their names*,' and

instantly we come into a feeling of longevity. That is the scholar's speech. Opening a single essay at random, we find in it citations from Montesquieu, Schiller, Milton, Herodotus, Shelley, Plutarch, Franklin, Bacon, Van Helmont, Goethe. So little does Emerson lend himself to the idle vanity of seeking all the treasures of wisdom in his own head, or neglecting the hoarded authority of the ages. It is true that he held the unholy opinion that a translation is as good as the original, or better. Nor need we suppose that he knew that pious sensation of the book-lover, the feel of a library; that he had any of the collector's amiable foolishness about rare editions; or that he nourished festive thoughts of 'that company of honest old fellows in their leathern jackets in his study,' as comrades in a sober old-world conviviality. His books were for spiritual use, like maps and charts of the mind of man, and not much for 'excellence of divertisement.' He had the gift of bringing his reading to bear easily upon the tenor of his musings, and knew how to use books as an aid to thinking, instead of letting them take the edge off thought. There was assuredly nothing of the compiler or the erudite collegian in him. It is a graver defect that he introduces the great names of literature without regard for true historical perspective in their place, either in relation to one another, or to the special phases of social change and shifting time. Still let his admirers not forget that Emerson was in his own way Scholar no less than Sage.

A word or two must be said of Emerson's verses. He disclaimed, for his own part, any belief that they were poems. Enthusiasts, however, have been found to declare that Emerson 'moves more constantly than any recent poet in the atmosphere of poesy. Since Milton and Spenser no man—not even Goethe—has equalled Emerson in this trait.' *The Problem*, according to another, 'is wholly unique, and transcends all contemporary verse in grandeur of style.' Such poetry, they say, is like Westminster Abbey, 'though the Abbey is inferior in boldness.' Yet, strangely enough, while Emerson's poetic form is symbolised by the flowing lines of Gothic architecture, it is also 'akin to Doric severity.' With all the good will in the world, I do not find myself able to rise to these heights; in fact, they rather seem to deserve Wordsworth's description, as mere obliquities of admiration.

Taken as a whole, Emerson's poetry is of that kind which springs, not from excitement of passion or feeling, but from an intellectual demand for intense and sublimated expression. We see the step that lifts him straight from prose to verse, and that step is the shortest possible. The flight is awkward and even uncouth, as if nature had intended feet rather than wings. It is hard to feel of Emerson, any more than Wordsworth could feel of Goethe, that his poetry is inevitable. The measure, the colour, the imaginative figures, are the product of search, not of spontaneous movements of sensation and reflection combining in a harmony that is delightful to the ear. They are the

outcome of a discontent with prose, not of that high-strung sensibility which compels the true poet into verse. This must not be said without exception. *The Threnody*, written after the death of a deeply loved child, is a beautiful and impressive lament. Pieces like *Musquetaquid*, the *Adirondacs*, the *Snowstorm*, *The Humble-Bee*, are pretty and pleasant bits of pastoral. In all we feel the pure breath of nature, and

> The primal mind,
> That flows in streams, that breathes in wind.

There is a certain charm of *naiveté*, that recalls the unvarnished simplicity of the Italian painters before Raphael. But who shall say that he discovers that 'spontaneous overflow of powerful feeling,' which a great poet has made the fundamental element of poetry? There are too few melodious progressions; the melting of the thought with natural images and with human feeling is incomplete; we miss the charm of perfect assimilation, fusion, and incorporation; and in the midst of all the vigour and courage of his work, Emerson has almost forgotten that it is part of the poet's business to give pleasure. It is true that pleasure is sometimes undoubtedly to be had from verse that is not above mediocrity, and Wordsworth once designed to write an essay examining why bad poetry pleases. Poetry that pleases may be bad, but it is equally true that no poetry which fails to please can be really good. Some one says that gems of expression make Emerson's essays oracular and his verse

prophetic. But, to borrow Horace's well-known phrase, 'tis not enough that poems should be sublime; *dulcia sunto*,—they must be touching and sympathetic. Only a bold critic will say that this is a mark of Emerson's poems. They are too naked, unrelated, and cosmic; too little clad with the vesture of human associations. Light and shade do not alternate in winning and rich relief, and as Carlyle found it, the radiance is 'thin piercing,' leaving none of the sweet and dim recesses so dear to the lover of nature. We may, however, well be content to leave a man of Emerson's calibre to choose his own exercises. It is best to suppose that he knew what he was about when he wandered into the fairyland of verse, and that in such moments he found nothing better to his hand. Yet if we are bidden to place him among the poets, it is enough to open Keats at the *Ode to a Nightingale*, or Shelley at *The Cloud*, the *Skylark*, or the *Sensitive Plant*, or Wordsworth at *Tintern Abbey*, or Goethe at *Das Göttliche*, or Victor Hugo in the *Contemplations*. Then in spite of occasional formality of rhythm and artifice in ornament, we cannot choose but perceive how tuneful is their music, how opulent the resources of their imagination, how various, subtle, and penetrating their affinity for the fortunes and sympathies of men, and next how modest a portion of all these rare and exquisite qualifications reveals itself in the verse of Emerson.

III.

Few minds of the first order that have busied themselves in contemplating the march of human fortunes, have marched forward in a straight line of philosophic speculation unbroken to the end. Like Burke, like Coleridge, like Wordsworth, at a given point they have a return upon themselves. Having mastered the truths of one side, their eyes open to what is true on the other; the work of revolution finished or begun, they experience fatigue and reaction. In Hawthorne's romance, after Miles Coverdale had passed his spring and summer among the Utopians of Blithedale, he felt that the time had come when he must for sheer sanity's sake go and hold a little talk with the Conservatives, the merchants, the politicians, 'and all those respectable old blockheads, who still in this intangibility and mistiness of affairs kept a death-grip on one or two ideas which had not come into vogue since yesterday morning.' 'No sagacious man,' says Hawthorne, 'will long retain his sagacity if he lives exclusively among reformers and progressive people, without periodically returning into the settled system of things, to correct himself by a new observation from that old stand-point.' Yet good men rightly hoped that 'out of the very thoughts that were wildest and most destructive might grow a wisdom, holy, calm, and pure, and that should incarnate itself with the substance of a noble and happy life.' Now that we are able to look back on the crisis of the times that

Hawthorne describes, we perceive that it was as he expected, and that in the person of Emerson the ferment and dissolvency of thought worked itself out in a strain of wisdom of the highest and purest.

In 1842 Emerson told Carlyle, in vindication of the *Dial* and its transcendentalisms, that if the direction of their speculations was as deplorable as Carlyle declared, it was yet a remarkable fact for history that all the bright young men and young women in New England, 'quite ignorant of each other, take the world so, and come and make confession to fathers and mothers—the boys, that they do not wish to go into trade; the girls, that they do not like morning calls and evening parties. They are all religious, but hate the churches; they reject all the ways of living of other men, but have none to offer in their stead.'

It is worth while to transcribe from the *Dial* itself the scene at one of the many Bostonian Conventions of that date—the Friends of Universal Progress, in 1840:—'The composition of the Assembly was rich and various. The singularity and latitude of the summons drew together, from all parts of New England, and also from the Middle States, men of every shade of opinion, from the straightest orthodoxy to the wildest heresy, and many persons whose church was a church of one member only. A great variety of dialect and of costume was noticed; a great deal of confusion, eccentricity, and freak appeared, as well as of zeal and enthusiasm. If the Assembly was disorderly, it was

picturesque. Madmen, madwomen, men with beards, Dunkers, Muggletonians, Come-outers, Groaners, Agrarians, Seventh-day Baptists, Quakers, Abolitionists, Calvinists, Unitarians, and philosophers, all came successively to the top, and seized their moment, if not their *hour*, wherein to chide or pray or preach or protest. The faces were a study. The most daring innovators, and the champions-until-death of the old cause, sat side by side. The still living merit of the oldest New England families, glowing yet after several generations, encountered the founders of families, fresh merit emerging and expanding the brows to a new breadth, and lighting a clownish face with sacred fire. The Assembly was characterised by the predominance of a certain plain sylvan strength and earnestness' (*Dial*, iii. 101).

If the shade of Bossuet could have looked down upon the scene, he would have found fresh material for the sarcasms which a hundred and fifty years before he had lavished on the Variations of the Protestant Churches. Yet this curious movement, bleak and squalid as it may seem to men nurtured in the venerable decorum of ecclesiastical tradition, was at bottom identical with the yearning for stronger spiritual emotions, and the cravings of religious zeal, that had in older times filled monasteries, manned the great orders, and sent wave upon wave of pilgrims and crusaders to holy places. 'It is really amazing,' as was said by Franklin or somebody else of his fashion of utilitarianism, that one of the passions which it is

hardest to develop in man is the passion for his own material comfort and temporal well-being.'

Emerson has put on record this mental intoxication of the progressive people around him, with a pungency that might satisfy the Philistines themselves.[1] From 1820 to 1844, he said, New England witnessed a general criticism and attack on institutions, and in all practical activities a gradual withdrawal of tender consciences from the social organisations. Calvinists and Quakers began to split into old school and new school. Goethe and the Germans became known. Swedenborg, in spite of his taint of craziness, by the mere prodigy of his speculations, began 'to spread himself into the minds of thousands'—including in no unimportant degree the mind of Emerson himself.[2] Literary criticism counted for something in the universal thaw, and even the genial humanity of Dickens helped to break up the indurations of old theology. Most powerful of all was the indirect influence of science. Geology disclosed law in an unsuspected region, and astronomy caused men to apprehend that 'as the earth is not the centre of the Universe, so it is not the special scene or stage on which the drama of divine justice is played before the assembled angels of heaven.'

A temper of scrutiny and dissent broke out in

[1] *New England Reformers: Essays*, ii. 511-519.

[2] The Swedenborgians—'a sect which, I think, must contribute more than all other sects to the new faith, which must come out of all.'—*To Carlyle*, 1834.

every direction. In almost every relation men and women asked themselves by what right Conformity levied its tax, and whether they were not false to their own consciences in paying it. 'What a fertility of projects for the salvation of the world! One apostle thought that all men should go to farming; and another thought that no man should buy or sell—that use of money was the cardinal evil; another thought the mischief was in our diet — that we eat and drink damnation. These made unleavened bread, and were foes to the death to fermentation. Others attacked the system of agriculture, the use of animal manures in farming, and the tyranny of man over brute instinct. These abuses polluted his food. The ox must be taken from the plough, and the horse from the cart; the hundred acres of the farm must be spaded, and the man must walk wherever boats and locomotives will not carry him. . . . Others assailed particular vocations. . . . Others attacked the institution of marriage as the fountain of social evils. . . Who gave me the money with which I bought my coat? Why should professional labour and that of the counting-house be paid so disproportionately to the labour of the porter and the woodsawer? Am I not too protected a person? Is there not a wide disparity between the lot of me and the lot of thee, my poor brother, my poor sister?'

One of Emerson's glories is, that while wise enough to discern the peril and folly of these excesses, he was under no temptation to fall back. It was giddy

work, but he kept his eye on the fixed stars. Certainly Emerson was not assailed by the stress of mighty and violent events, as Burke and Wordsworth were in some sense turned into reactionaries by the calamities of revolution in France. The 'distemper of enthusiasm,' as Shaftesbury would have called it, took a mild and harmless form in New England: there the work in hand was not the break-up of a social system, but only the mental evolution of new ideals, the struggle of an ethical revival, and the satisfaction of a livelier spirit of scruple. In face of all delirations, Emerson kept on his way of radiant sanity and perfect poise. Do not, he warned his enthusiasts, expend all energy on some accidental evil, and so lose sanity and power of benefit. '*It is of little moment that one or two or twenty errors of our social system be corrected, but of much that the man be in his senses.* Society gains nothing whilst a man, not himself renovated, attempts to renovate things around him; he has become tediously good in some particular, but negligent or narrow in the rest, and hypocrisy and vanity are often the disgusting result. It is handsomer to remain in the establishment, better than the establishment, and conduct that in the best manner, than to make a sally against evil by some single improvement, without supporting it by a total regeneration.'

Emerson, then, is one of the few moral reformers whose mission lay in calming men rather than in rousing them, and in the inculcation of serenity rather than in the spread of excitement. Though he had been

ardent in protest against the life conventional, as soon as the protest ran off into extravagance, instead of either following or withstanding it with rueful petulancies, he delicately and successfully turned a passing agitation into an enduring revival. The last password given by the dying Antonine to the officer of the watch was *Æquanimitas*. In a brighter, wider, and more living sense than was possible even to the noblest in the middle of the second century, this, too, was the watchword of the Emersonian teaching. Instead of cultivating the tormenting and enfeebling spirit of scruple, instead of multiplying precepts, he bade men not to crush their souls out under the burden of Duty; they are to remember that a wise life is not wholly filled up by commandments to do and to abstain from doing. Hence, we have in Emerson the teaching of a vigorous morality without the formality of dogma and the deadly tedium of didactics. If not laughter, of which only Shakespeare among the immortals has a copious and unfailing spring, there is at least gaiety in every piece, and a cordial injunction to men to find joy in their existence to the full. Happiness is with him an aim that we are at liberty to seek directly and without periphrasis. Provided men do not lose their balance by immersing themselves in their pleasures, they are right, according to Emerson, in pursuing them. But joy is no neighbour to artificial ecstasy. What Emerson counsels the poet, he intended in its own way and degree for all men. The poet's habit of living, he says beautifully, should be set on a key so

low that the commonest influences should delight him. 'That spirit which suffices quiet hearts, which seems to come forth to such from every dry knoll of sere grass, from every pine-stump and half-embedded stone on which the dull March sun shines, comes forth to the poor and hungry, and such as are of simple taste. If thou fill thy brain with Boston and New York, with fashion and covetousness, and wilt stimulate thy jaded senses with wine and French coffee, thou shalt find no radiance of wisdom in the lonely waste of the pinewoods' (ii. 328).

It was perhaps the same necessity of having to guide men away from the danger of transcendental aberrations, while yet holding up lofty ideals of conduct, that made Emerson say something about many traits of conduct to which the ordinary high-flying moralist of the treatise or the pulpit seldom deigns to stoop. The essays on Domestic Life, on Behaviour, on Manners, are examples of the attention that Emerson paid to the right handling of the outer conditions of a wise and brave life. With him small circumstances are the occasions of great qualities. The parlour and the counting-house are as fit scenes for fortitude, self-control, considerateness, and vision, as the senate or the battlefield. He re-classifies the virtues. No modern, for example, has given so remarkable a place to Friendship among the sacred necessities of well-endowed character. Neither Plato nor Cicero, least of all Bacon, has risen to so noble and profound a conception of this most strangely

commingled of all human affections. There is no modern thinker, again, who makes Beauty—all that is gracious, seemly, and becoming — so conspicuous and essential a part of life. It would be inexact to say that Emerson blended the beautiful with the precepts of duty or of prudence into one complex sentiment, as the Greeks did, but his theory of excellence might be better described than any other of modern times by the καλοκἀγαθία, the virtue of the true gentleman, as set down in Plato and Aristotle.

So untrue is it that in his quality of Sage Emerson always haunted the perilous altitudes of Transcendentalism, 'seeing nothing under him but the everlasting snows of Himalaya, the Earth shrinking to a Planet, and the indigo Firmament sowing itself with daylight stars.' He never thinks it beneath his dignity to touch a point of minor morals, or to say a good word for what he somewhere calls subterranean prudence. Emerson values mundane circumspection as highly as Franklin, and gives to manners and rules of daily behaviour an importance that might have satisfied Chesterfield. In fact, the worldly and the selfish are mistaken when they assume that Common Sense is their special and exclusive portion. The small Transcendentalist goes in search of truth with the meshes of his net so large that he takes no fish. His landscapes are all horizon. It is only the great idealists, like Emerson, who take care not to miss the real.

The remedy for the break-down of the old churches would, in the mind of the egotist, have been to found a new one. But Emerson knew well before Carlyle told him, that 'no truly great man, from Jesus Christ downwards, ever founded a sect—I mean wilfully intended founding one.' Not only did he establish no sect, but he preached a doctrine that was positively incompatible with the erection of any sect upon its base. His whole hope for the world lies in the internal and independent resources of the individual. If mankind is to be raised to a higher plane of happiness and worth, it can only be by the resolution of each to live his own life with fidelity and courage. The spectacle of one liberated from the malign obstructions to free human character, is a stronger incentive to others than exhortation, admonition, or any sum of philanthropical association. If I, in my own person and daily walk, quietly resist heaviness of custom, coldness of hope, timidity of faith, then without wishing, contriving, or even knowing it, I am a light silently drawing as many as have vision and are fit to walk in the same path. Whether I do that or not, I am at least obeying the highest law of my own being.

In the appeal to the individual to be true to himself, Emerson does not stand apart from other great moral reformers. His distinction lies in the peculiar direction that he gives to his appeal. All those regenerators of the individual, from Rousseau down to J. S. Mill, who derived their first principles, whether

directly or indirectly, from Locke and the philosophy of sensation, experience, and acquisition, began operations with the will. They laid all their stress on the shaping of motives by education, institutions, and action, and placed virtue in deliberateness and in exercise. Emerson, on the contrary, coming from the intuitional camp, holds that our moral nature is vitiated by any interference of our will. Translated into the language of theology, his doctrine makes regeneration to be a result of grace, and the guide of conscience to be the indwelling light; though, unlike the theologians, he does not trace either of these mysterious gifts to the special choice and intervention of a personal Deity. Impulsive and spontaneous innocence is higher than the strength to conquer temptation. The natural motions of the soul are so much better than the voluntary ones. 'There is no such thing as manufacturing a strong will,' for all great force is real and elemental. In all this Emerson suffers from the limitations that are inseparable from pure spiritualism in all its forms. As if the spiritual constitution were ever independent of the material organisation bestowed upon the individual at the moment when he is conceived, or of the social conditions that close about him from the instant of his birth. The reaction, however, against what was superficial in the school of the eighteenth century went to its extreme length in Emerson, and blinded his eyes to the wisdom, the profundity, and the fruitfulness of their leading speculations. It is

enough for us to note the fact in passing, without plunging into contention on the merits. All thoughts are always ready, potentially if not actually. Each age selects and assimilates the philosophy that is most apt for its wants. Institutions needed regeneration in France, and so those thinkers came into vogue and power who laid most stress on the efficacy of good institutions. In Emerson's America, the fortunes of the country made external circumstances safe for a man, and his chance was assured; so a philosophy was welcomed which turned the individual inwards upon himself, and taught him to consider his own character and spiritual faculty as something higher than anything external could ever be.

Again to make a use which is not uninstructive of the old tongue, Emerson is for faith before works. Nature, he says, will not have us fret and fume. She does not like our benevolences, our churches, our pauper-societies, much better than she likes our frauds and wars. They are but so many yokes to the neck. Our painful labours are unnecessary and fruitless. A higher law than that of our will regulates events. If we look wider, things are all alike: laws and creeds and modes of living are a travesty of truth. Only in our easy, simple, spontaneous action are we strong, and by contenting ourselves with obedience we become strong. Our real action is in our silent moments. Why should we be awed by the name of Action? 'Tis a trick of the senses.[1]

[1] *Essays:* Spiritual Laws, etc.

Justification by faith has had a savour of antinomianism and indifferency ever since the day when Saint Paul so emphatically denied that he made void the law through faith, and said of certain calumniators that their damnation was just. Emerson was open to the same charge, and he knew it. In a passage already quoted, Emerson says good-humouredly that his wife keeps his philosophy from running to antinomianism. He could not mistake the tendency of saying that, if you look wider, things are all alike, and that we are in the grasp of a higher law than our own will. On that side he only paints over in rainbow colours the grim doctrine which the High Calvinist and the Materialistic Necessarian hold in common.

All great minds perceive all things; the only difference lies in the order in which they shall choose to place them. Emerson, for good reason of his own, dwelt most on fate, character, and the unconscious and hidden sources, but he writes many a page of vigorous corrective. It is wholesome, he says, to man to look not at Fate, but the other way; the practical view is the other. As Mill says of his wish to disbelieve the doctrine of the formation of character by circumstances—'Remembering the wish of Fox respecting the doctrine of resistance to governments, that it might never be forgotten by Kings nor remembered by subjects, I said that it would be a blessing if the doctrine of necessity could be believed by all *quoad* the characters of others, and disbelieved in

regard to their own.' So Emerson knew well enough that man's consciousness of freedom, action, and power over outer circumstances might be left to take care of itself, as the practical view generally can. The world did not need him to tell it that a man's fortunes are a part of his character. His task was the more far-reaching one of drawing them to recognise that love is the important thing, not benevolent works; that only impure men consider life as it is reflected in events, opinions, and persons; that they fail to see the action until it is done, whereas what is far better worth considering is that its moral element præ-existed in the actor.

It would be easy to show that Emerson has not worked out his answers to these eternal enigmas, for ever reproducing themselves in all ages, in such a form as to defy the logician's challenge. He never shrinks from inconsistent propositions. He was unsystematic on principle. 'He thought that truth has so many facets that the best we can do is to notice each in turn, without troubling ourselves whether they agree.' When we remember the inadequateness of human language, the infirmities of our vision. and all the imperfections of mental apparatus, the wise men will not disdain even partial glimpses of a scene too vast and intricate to be comprehended in a single map. To complain that Emerson is no systematic reasoner is to miss the secret of most of those who have given powerful impulses to the spiritual ethics of an age. It is

not a syllogism that turns the heart towards purification of life and aim; it is not the logically enchained propositions of a *sorites*, but the flash of illumination, the indefinable accent, that attracts masses of men to a new teacher and a high doctrine. The teasing *ergoteur* is always right, but he never leads nor improves nor inspires.

Any one can see how this side of the Emersonian gospel harmonised with the prepossessions of a new democracy. Trust, he said, to leading instincts, not to traditional institutions, nor social ordering, nor the formulæ of books and schools for the formation of character; the great force is real and elemental. In art, Mr. Ruskin has explained the palpable truth that semi-civilised nations can colour better than we do, and that an Indian shawl and China vase are inimitable by us. 'It is their glorious ignorance of all rules that does it; the pure and true instincts have play, and do their work; and the moment we begin teaching people any rules about colour, and make them do this or that, we crush the instinct, generally for ever' (*Modern Painters*, iii. 91). Emerson said what comes to the same thing about morals. The philosophy of democracy, or the government of a great mixed community by itself, rests on a similar assumption in politics. The foundations of a self-governed society on a great scale are laid in leading instincts. Emerson was never tired of saying that we are wiser than we know. The path of science and of letters is not the way

to nature. What was done in a remote age by men whose names have resounded far, has no deeper sense than what you and I do to-day. What food, or experience, or succour have Olympiads and Consulates for the Esquimaux seal-hunter, for the Kanáka in his canoe, for the fisherman, the stevedore, the porter? When he is in this vein Emerson often approaches curiously near to Rousseau's memorable and most potent paradox of 1750, that the sciences corrupt manners.[1]

Most men will now agree that when the great fiery trial came, the Emersonian faith and the democratic assumption abundantly justified themselves. Even Carlyle wrote to Emerson at last (June 4, 1871): 'In my occasional explosions against Anarchy, and my inextinguishable hatred of *it*, I privately whisper to myself, "Could any Friedrich Wilhelm now, or Friedrich, or most perfect Governor you could hope to realise, guide forward what is America's essential task at present, faster or more completely than 'Anarchic America' is now doing?" Such "Anarchy" has a great deal to say for itself.'

The traits of comparison between Carlyle and Emerson may be regarded as having been pretty nearly exhausted for the present, until time has

[1] What so good, asks Rousseau, 'as a sweet and precious ignorance, the treasure of a pure soul at peace with itself, which finds all its blessedness in inward retreat, in testifying to itself its own innocence, and which feels no need of seeking a warped and hollow happiness in the opinion of other people as to its enlightenment?'

changed the point of view. In wit, humour, pathos, penetration, poetic grandeur, and fervid sublimity of imagination, Carlyle is the superior beyond measure. But Emerson is as much his superior in that high and transparent sanity, which is not further removed from midsummer madness than it is from a terrene and grovelling mediocrity. This sanity, among other things, kept Emerson in line with the ruling tendencies of his age, and his teaching brings all the aid that abstract teaching can, towards the solution of the moral problems of modern societies. Carlyle chose to fling himself headlong and blindfold athwart the great currents of things, against all the forces and elements that are pushing modern societies forward. Beginning in his earlier work with the same faith as Emerson in leading instincts, he came to dream that the only leading instinct worth thinking about is that of self-will, mastery, force, and violent strength. Emerson was for basing the health of a modern commonwealth on the only real strength, and the only kind of force that can be relied upon, namely, the honest, manly, simple, and emancipated character of the citizen. This gives to his doctrine a hold and a prize on the work of the day, and makes him our helper. Carlyle's perverse reaction had wrecked and stranded him when the world came to ask him for direction. In spite of his resplendent genius, he had no direction to give, and was only able in vague and turbid torrents of words to hide a shallow and obsolete lesson. His confession to Emerson, quoted above,

looks as if at last he had found this out for himself.

If Emerson stood thus well towards the social and political drift of events, his teaching was no less harmoniously related to the new and most memorable drift of science which set in by his side. It is a misconception to pretend that he was a precursor of the Darwinian theory. Evolution, as a possible explanation of the ordering of the universe, is a great deal older than either Emerson or Darwin. What Darwin did was to work out in detail and with masses of minute evidence a definite hypothesis of the specific conditions under which new forms are evolved. Emerson, of course, had no definite hypothesis of this sort, nor did he possess any of the knowledge necessary to give it value. But it was his good fortune that some of his strongest propositions harmonise with the scientific theory of the survival of the fittest in the struggle for material existence. He connects his exhortation to self-reliance with the law working in nature for conservation and growth,—to wit, that 'Power is in nature the essential measure of right,' and that 'Nature suffers nothing to remain in her kingdom which cannot help itself.' The same strain is constantly audible. Nature on every side, within us and without, is for ever throwing out new forms and fresh varieties of living and thinking. To her experiments in every region there is no end. Those succeed which prove to have the best adaptation to the conditions. Let, therefore, neither society nor

the individual check experiment, originality, and infinite variation. Such language, we may see, fits in equally well with democracy in politics and with evolution in science. If, moreover, modern science gives more prominence to one conception than another, it is to that of the natural universe of force and energy, as One and a Whole. This too is the great central idea with Emerson, repeated a thousand times in prose and in verse, and lying at the very heart of his philosophy. Newton's saying that 'the world was made at one cast' delights him. 'The secret of the world is that its energies are *solidaires*.' Nature 'publishes itself in creatures, reaching from particles and spicula, through transformation on transformation to the highest symmetries. A little heat, that is, a little motion, is all that differences the bald dazzling white and deadly cold poles of the earth from the prolific tropical climates.' Not only, as Professor Tyndall says, is Emerson's religious sense entirely undaunted by the discoveries of science; all such discoveries he comprehends and assimilates. 'By Emerson scientific conceptions are continually transmuted into the finer forms and warmer lines of an ideal world.'

That these transmutations are often carried by Emerson to the extent of vain and empty self-mystifications is hard to deny, even for those who have most sympathy with the general scope of his teaching. There are pages that to the present writer, at least, after reasonably diligent meditation, remain mere abra-

cadabra, incomprehensible and worthless. For much of this in Emerson, the influence of Plato is mainly responsible, and it may be noted in passing that his account of Plato (*Representative Men*) is one of his most unsatisfactory performances. 'The title of Platonist,' says Mill, 'belongs by far better right to those who have been nourished in, and have endeavoured to practise Plato's mode of investigation, than to those who are distinguished only by the adoption of certain dogmatical conclusions, drawn mostly from the least intelligible of his works.' Nothing is gained by concealing that not every part of Emerson's work will stand the test of the Elenchus, nor bear reduction into honest and intelligible English.

One remarkable result of Emerson's idealism ought not to be passed over. 'The visible becomes the Bestial,' said Carlyle, 'when it rests not on the invisible.' To Emerson all rested on the invisible, and was summed up in terms of the invisible, and hence the Bestial was almost unknown in his philosophic scheme. Nay, we may say that some mighty phenomena in our universe were kept studiously absent from his mind. Here is one of the profoundest differences between Emerson and most of those who, on as high an altitude, have pondered the same great themes. A small trait will serve for illustration. It was well known in his household that he could not bear to hear of ailments. 'There is one topic,' he writes, 'peremptorily forbidden to all well-bred, to all rational mortals, namely, their distempers. If you

have not slept, or if you have slept, or if you have headache, sciatica, or leprosy, or thunder-stroke, I beseech you by all angels to hold your peace, and not pollute the morning, to which all the housemates bring serene and pleasant thoughts, by corruption and groans. Come out of the azure. Love the day'—(*Conduct of Life*, 159).

If he could not endure these minor perturbations of the fair and smiling face of daily life, far less did he willingly think of Death. Of nothing in all the wide range of universal topics does Emerson say so little as of that which has lain in sombre mystery at the very core of most meditations on life, from Job and Solon down to Bacon and Montaigne. Except in two beautiful poems, already mentioned, Death is almost banished from his page. It is not the title or the subject of one of his essays, only secondarily even of that on Immortality. Love, Friendship, Prudence, Heroism, Experience, Manners, Nature, Greatness, and a score of other matters—but none to show that he ever sat down to gather into separate and concentrated shape his reflections on the terrifying phantom that has haunted the mind of man from the very birth of time.

Pascal bade us imagine a number of men in chains and doomed to death; some of them each day butchered in sight of the others; those who remained watching their own lot in that of their fellows, and awaiting their turn in anguish and helplessness. Such, he cried, is the pitiful and desperate condition of

man. But nature has other cruelties more stinging than death. Mill, himself an optimist, yet declares the course of natural phenomena to be replete with everything which, when committed by human beings is most worthy of abhorrence, so that 'one who endeavoured in his actions to imitate the natural course of things would be universally seen and acknowledged to be the wickedest of men.' To man himself, moreover, 'the most criminal actions are not more unnatural than most of the virtues.' We need not multiply from poets and divines, from moralists and sages, these grim pictures. The sombre melancholy, the savage moral indignation, the passionate intellectual scorn, with which life and the universe have filled strong souls, some with one emotion and some with another, were all to Emerson in his habitual thinking unintelligible and remote. He admits, indeed, that 'the disease and deformity around us certify that infraction of natural, intellectual, and moral laws, and often violation on violation to breed such compound misery.' The way of Providence, he says in another place, is a little rude, through earthquakes, fever, the sword of climate, and a thousand other hints of ferocity in the interiors of nature. Providence has a wild rough incalculable road to its end, and 'it is of no use to try to whitewash its huge mixed instrumentalities, or to dress up that terrific benefactor in a clean shirt and white neckcloth of a student of divinity.' But he only drew from the thought of these cruelties of the

universe the practical moral that 'our culture must not omit the arming of the man.' He is born into the state of war, and will therefore do well to acquire a military attitude of soul. There is perhaps no better moral than this of the Stoic, but greater impressiveness might have marked the lesson, if our teacher had been more indulgent to the man's sense of tragedy in that vast drama in which he plays his piteous part.

In like manner, Emerson has little to say of that horrid burden and impediment on the soul, which the churches call Sin, and which, by whatever name we call it, is a very real catastrophe in the moral nature of man. He had no eye, like Dante's, for the vileness, the cruelty, the utter despicableness to which humanity may be moulded. If he saw them at all, it was through the softening and illusive medium of generalised phrases. Nor was he ever shocked and driven into himself by 'the immoral thoughtlessness' of men. The courses of nature, and the prodigious injustices of man in society, affect him with neither horror nor awe. He will see no monster if he can help it. For the fatal Nemesis or terrible Erinnyes, daughters of Erebus and Night, Emerson substitutes a fair-weather abstraction named Compensation. One radical tragedy in nature he admits—'the distinction of More and Less.' If I am poor in faculty, dim in vision, shut out from opportunity, in every sense an outcast from the inheritance of the earth, that seems indeed to be a tragedy. 'But see the facts clearly and these moun-

tainous inequalities vanish. Love reduces them, as the sun melts the iceberg in the sea. The heart and soul of all men being one, this bitterness of His and Mine ceases. His is mine.' Surely words, words, words! What can be more idle, when one of the world's bitter puzzles is pressed on the teacher, than that he should betake himself to an altitude whence it is not visible, and then assure us that it is not only invisible, but non-existent? This is not to see the facts clearly, but to pour the fumes of obscuration round them. When he comforts us by saying 'Love, and you shall be loved,' who does not recall cases which make the Jean Valjean of Victor Hugo's noble romance not a figment of the theatre, but an all too actual type? The believer who looks to another world to redress the wrongs and horrors of this; the sage who warns us that the law of life is resignation, renunciation, and doing-without (*entbehren sollst du*)—each of these has a foothold in common language. But to say that all infractions of love and equity are speedily punished—punished by fear—and then to talk of the perfect compensation of the universe, is mere playing with words, for it does not solve the problem in the terms in which men propound it. Emerson, as we have said, held the spirit of System in aversion as fettering the liberal play of thought, just as in morals, with greater boldness, he rebelled against a minute and cramping interpretation of Duty. We are not sure that his own optimistic doctrine did not play him the

same tyrannical trick, by sealing his eyes to at least one half of the actualities of nature and the gruesome possibilities of things. It had no unimportant effect on Emerson's thought that he was born in a new world that had cut itself loose from old history. The black and devious ways through which the race has marched are not real in North America, as they are to us in old Europe, who live on the very site of secular iniquities, are surrounded by monuments of historic crime, and find present and future entangled, embittered, inextricably loaded both in blood and in institutions with desperate inheritances from the past.

There are many topics, and those no mean topics, on which the best authority is not the moralist by profession, as Emerson was, but the man of the world. The world hardens, narrows, desiccates common natures, but nothing so enriches generous ones. For knowledge of the heart of man, we must go to those who were closer to the passions and interests of actual and varied life than Emerson ever could have been—to Horace, Montaigne, La Bruyère, Swift, Molière, even to Pope. If a hostile critic were to say that Emerson looked at life too much from the outside, as the clergyman is apt to do, we should condemn such a remark as a disparagement, but we should understand what it is in Emerson that the critic means. He has not the temperament of the great humorists, under whatever planet they may have been born, jovial, mercurial, or saturnine. Even his revolt against formalism is only a new fashion of

composure, and sometimes comes dangerously near to moral dilettantism. The persistent identification of everything in nature with everything else sometimes bewilders, fatigues, and almost afflicts us. Though he warns us that our civilisation is not near its meridian, but as yet only in the cock-crowing and the morning star, still all ages are much alike with him: man is always man, 'society never advances,' and he does almost as little as Carlyle himself to fire men with faith in social progress as the crown of wise endeavour. But when all these deductions have been made and amply allowed for, Emerson remains among the most persuasive and inspiring of those who by word and example rebuke our despondency, purify our sight, awaken us from the deadening slumbers of convention and conformity, exorcise the pestering imps of vanity, and lift men up from low thoughts and sullen moods of helplessness and impiety.

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